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DECEMBER

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MC-8 . . . Lady's BULOVA and in the charm and color of NATURAL GOLD too! 17 Jewel Bulova movement. Never before a BULOVA value like this. Link bracelet. **$24.75 — $1.00 down — only $2.37 a mo.**

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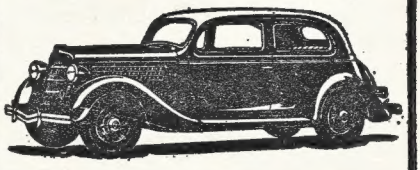

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This offer is made by a large, old established and reputable company noted for the quality of its products—absolutely guaranteed. Send for full facts about opening in your locality. Complete details will be mailed free. Send coupon—ACT AT ONCE.

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Please send full free facts about operating a local Coffee Agency paying up to $60 in a week. Also tell me about your Ford Sedan or $500.00 Cash Bonus offer to your producers.

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Adventure
(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 98, No. 2 for December, 1937 Published Once a Month

The Redhead from Tulluco (1st part of 5) . **GORDON YOUNG** 8
When a man stares, stare back; when he shoots, shoot back; and get your guns loaded right away again, because even men who need killing have friends.

Trust a Pathan? (a novelette) . . . . . **PERRY ADAMS** 34
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There was gold in plenty on Lost Creek, and only a kid in the way—a kid named Mad Murdo McPhie.

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Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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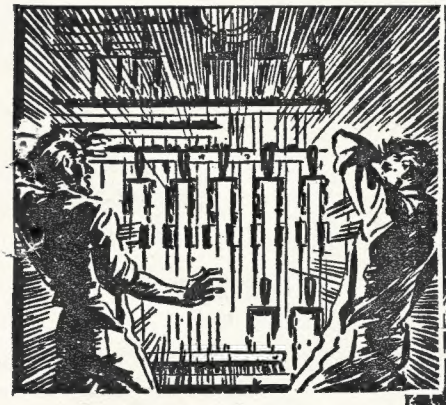
Panic Loomed...The Show Went On!



Crowded Theatre Goes Dark as Fuse Blows

"The dog-and-pony number was finishing," writes Stage Manager Frank M. Polhamius, Jr., of 195 Fuller Lane, Winnetka, Ill., "when an overloaded main fuse blew out. As the stage went black, panic threatened the lives of thousands crowding the full house.

"Part of my equipment as stage manager is my trusty 'Eveready' flashlight. Before the audience could sense that anything was wrong, I called for the curtain, dashed to the wings and played my flashlight on the apron of the stage like a baby spot.

"Fortunately, a dance team was ready to go on. In a split second they were on the stage and going through their routine in the spot furnished by my flashlight. DATED 'Eveready' batteries in that flashlight had lighted my way around dark theatres for many weeks before they were called upon to meet this spine-chilling emergency. So you can bet I realized in those critical moments just how much it can mean to buy batteries that are *fresh* and full of life. No one can ever know how many lives were saved by DATED 'Eveready' batteries that night.

(*Signed*) Edward M. Polhamius Jr.

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The DATE-LINE guarantees FRESHNESS

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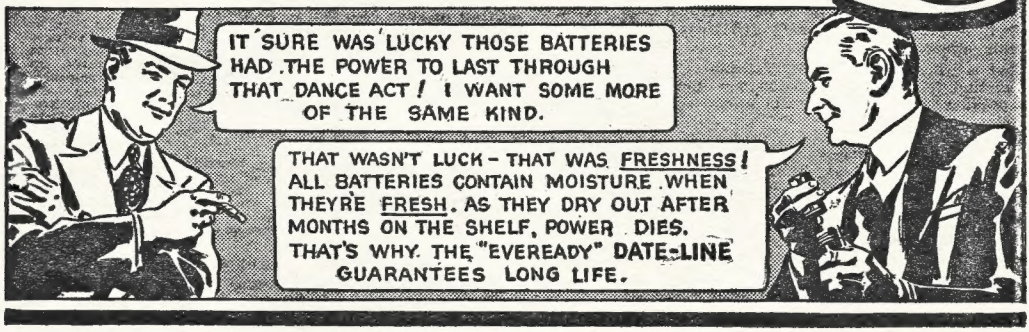
IT SURE WAS LUCKY THOSE BATTERIES HAD THE POWER TO LAST THROUGH THAT DANCE ACT! I WANT SOME MORE OF THE SAME KIND.
THAT WASN'T LUCK - THAT WAS FRESHNESS! ALL BATTERIES CONTAIN MOISTURE. WHEN THEY'RE FRESH, AS THEY DRY OUT AFTER MONTHS ON THE SHELF, POWER DIES. THAT'S WHY THE "EVEREADY" DATE-LINE GUARANTEES LONG LIFE.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or the fates. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name and full address if possible. All inquiries along this line, unless otherwise designated, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name. Please notify ADVENTURE immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, every inquiry addressed to "Lost Trails" will be run in three consecutive issues.

Where is Robert Pinkerton of 131st Company, U. S. Marine Artillery, Quantico, Va., 1917-1919? His friend Thomas P. Jordan, 1523 N. Main Ave., Scranton, Pa., queries.

William L. Harcus, Kerrville, Texas, wants news of his brother Henry (Harry) L. Harcus, Kansas City, Mo., fearing abrupt end of correspondence in 1922 meant sudden death.

Wolffe W. Roberts, Box 56, Amherst, N. H., wants word of Frank B. (Jack) Frost, last heard from at Oakland, Calif.

Richard J. Lutz, R. D. 1, Verona, Pa., would like to hear of Frank Fittante. They were marines at Quantico in 1926, when Lutz was ordered to China and Fittante to Nicaragua.

Anyone in D Company, 15th U.S. Infantry, that went to China in 1912, or anyone in the band of the 2nd Battalion, South Wales Borderers, in China 1913, 1914—write Pennock S. Bromall, 216 West 5th St., Chester, Pa.

A letter has come from Pendleton, Bangkok, Siam, for Capt. R. W. van Raven. Who knows Capt. van Raven's address?

Word wanted of Hamilton Redfield Norvell, sometimes called "Reddy" or "Curley," by his brother, Stevens Thompson Norvell, 4449 Howard Ave., Western Springs, Ill. Their father died on Dec. 30, 1936. Norvell lived in Cincinnati until 1932, went to Southern Ontario.

Clarence Bailey, Cherryvale, Kansas, seeks news of Wylie Boss Smith, who sailed as oiler in June, 1934, from New Orleans on S. S. Point Salinas.

Otho Amos Duckwiler, formerly of Roanoke, Va., joined U. S. Army in 1914. Sta-

(Continued on page 6)

How do you know you can't write?

HAVE you ever tried? Have you ever attempted even the least bit of training, under competent guidance?

Or have you been sitting back, as it is so easy to do, waiting for the day to come some time when you will awaken, all of a sudden, to the discovery, "I *am* a writer"?

If the latter course is the one of your choosing, you probably *never will write*. Lawyers must be law clerks. Engineers must be draftsmen. We all know that, in our times, the egg does come before the chicken.

It is seldom that any one becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is why so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of writing—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their insight, their background and their confidence as nothing else could.

That is why the Newspaper Institute of America bases its writing instruction on journalism—the training that has produced so many successful authors.

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NO- NOT ME. I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE MY TIME. SUCCESS IS JUST A MATTER OF LUCK AND I WASN'T BORN LUCKY.
BILL SAID "YES" HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY IN RADIO NOW
THIS N.R.I. TRAINING IS GREAT. AND THEY SENT REAL RADIO PARTS TO HELP ME LEARN QUICKLY
YOU CERTAINLY KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER.
I'VE BEEN STUDYING RADIO ONLY A FEW MONTHS AND I'M ALREADY MAKING GOOD MONEY IN MY SPARE TIME
THANKS
OH BILL! I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO
YES! I'VE GOT A GOOD JOB NOW AND A REAL FUTURE. THANKS TO N.R.I. TRAINING
TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"
BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME
SAME OLD GRIND -- SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE -- I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO
GUESS I'M A FAILURE. LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE
YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE, TOM, UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. WISHING AND WAITING WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE

I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *in Spare Time*

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J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 7NS9
Washington, D. C.

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 7NS9
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)

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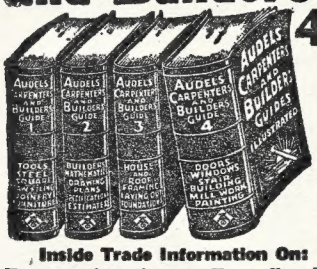

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Address.....

Occupation.....

Reference.....M.G.

LOST TRAILS

(Continued from page 4)

tioned Texas City, Texas, in 1914. Transferred to Field Artillery stationed Canal Zone 1918, 1919. His sister has died, and her daughter, Virginia Pulewich, 10 East 109 St., New York City, wants to hear from him.

Charles W. Cantrell, 8231 Germantown Ave., Philadelphia, wants word of Lieut. John Lewin and O'Neil Sievere.

Henry D. McGregor, 1708 Baker Avenue, Everett, Wash., wants to hear from an old shipmate, Gilford John Colvin, pharmacist's mate U.S.N. 1918-1919, later in Spokane, Wash.

Craig D. Hanson, who left Portland, Oregon, in 1935. Word wanted by G. P. Sylvester, 9535 S.E., Harold St., Portland, Oregon.

Where is Napier Mearns Crosett, his friend, J. Monte Dunstan, 51 South Beaver Street, York, Penn., queries.

Will "Sarge" Ralph Kingsley of Military Specialist Company, A.P.O. 727, write to "Kid" Collins Ewing, Odessa, Mo.

Captain Fred Ewing, Ex-Marine of Santa Domingo, please get in touch with Mrs. Sarrah Olson of 2103 N.W., Hoyt St., Portland, Oregon, or Ethel Ewing, 136-19th St., E., Holland, Michigan.

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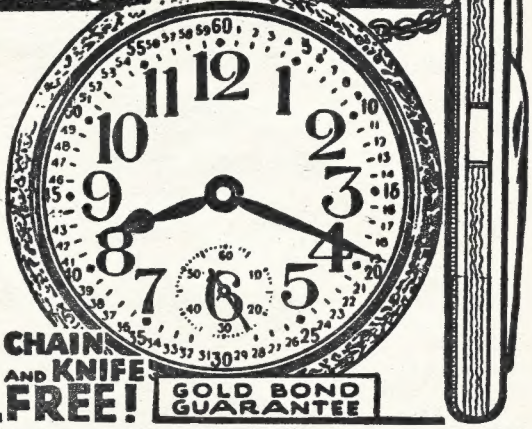

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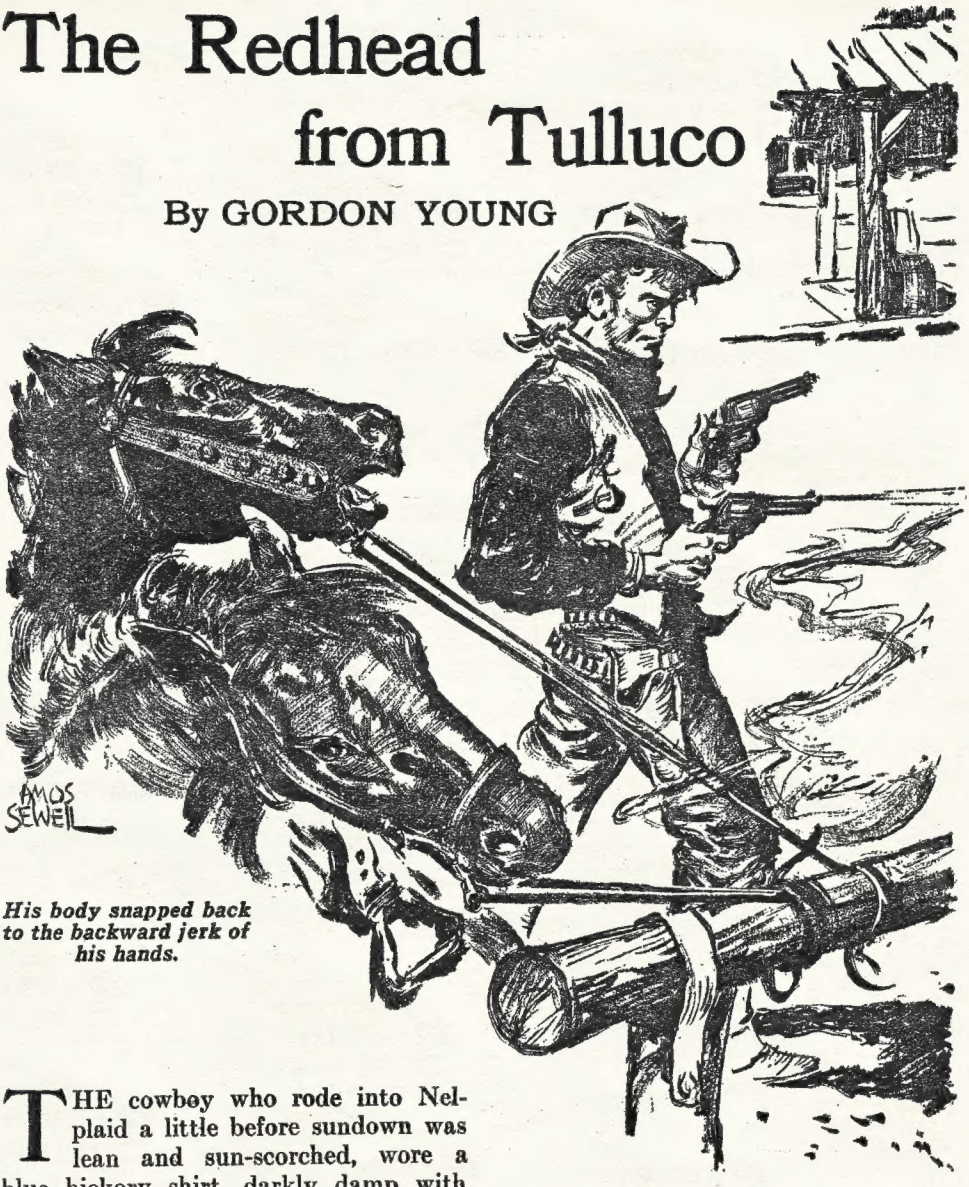
The Redhead from Tulluco

By GORDON YOUNG



His body snapped back to the backward jerk of his hands.

THE cowboy who rode into Nelplaid a little before sundown was lean and sun-scorched, wore a blue hickory shirt, darkly damp with sweat splotches, an old gray vest, blue denim trousers, but the boots were of fine leather with dollar-sized spurs strapped to them.

His hair was the color of brick dust, his face as brown as wind with some swirling sand in it, and the hot sun, could make a man's face, and he had eyes that were as blue as the lupine flower; but it would have made him mad if you said so. He didn't like lupines. They were bad for cows; enough bad to be called loco weed.

Nelplaid was a little town, forty miles from nowhere, but much like other cow-towns of scattered lumps of 'dobe and rough boards that Red was used to. There was so much flour-fine dust in the mid-summer street that anybody from a distance might have thought the town was on fire when a bunch of cowboys galloped through.

Not many people were astir when Red rode in; and such as happened to have their noses against dusty windows or loitered in doorways eyed him with suspicion. The big barrel-chested black with a claw-hammer for a head, the sapling thin legs and lean flanks of a greyhound, looked like too fine a horse for a mere puncher; and Red not only had an eight-square rifle under his leg but two long Colts on his thighs.

The Nelplaid was troubled country. There were a lot of little ranches back up in the hogbacks that flanked the big ranches of the foothills and valleys—which made it nice for rustlers. Big ranchers always, or nearly always, accuse little ranchers of being rustlers.

On top of that, outlaws rode the back trails, stealing horses, dashing off a hundred miles or so to hold up a train now and then, a bank here and there. The Kilcos they were called, and folks were

dead sure that the outlaws and rustlers had a way of giving one another a helping hand. So any heavily armed stranger who came jogging into Nelplaid was pretty sure to be put down by the town's people as a killer on the dodge, coming in on somebody's borrowed horse to throw in with the bad bunch.

Red came at a slow *chop-clop chop-clop* through the ankle deep dust, wiped his sweaty nose on the blue handkerchief about his neck, and was glad that the ride was over.

He passed four horses hitched before the long hitch-rack under a scraggly cottonwood beside the narrow broken sidewalk that humped itself into two steps to get to the platform before the general store.

He turned in beside the other horses, dropping his reins as he came out of the saddle. Red shook himself, pushed back his hat, took a long tired breath and hitched up the heavy belts. Their loops glittered with the bright brass heads of cartridges. Red, for all of his youth, had so many times had to scrouge down where there wasn't much of a place to scrouge and stand off people who didn't like him, that he made a point of carrying a lot of bullets.

The long .45's were in slick black holsters that sagged low on his thighs, and the holsters were tied down by buckskin thongs. He had all the earmarks of a badman, or a man who wanted to be thought bad, except for the straight blue eyes that usually glinted with amusement if he didn't dislike somebody that he happened to be looking at.

There was about a five foot space between the general store and the building next door, which was Dave's Silver Dollar—so a weather-worn sign said.

Four or five men, lounging against the front of Dave's Silver Dollar, with thumbs in belts and backs to the 'dobe wall, sullenly sized him up.

He glanced their way, saw how they looked at him and so he took a longer look on his own account. Red, with his quick-smiling mouth and good humor, made people who didn't know him well think he wasn't much more than a fool kid; and he was a good deal like one until he was shouldered with some responsibility or got mad; then he might act pretty foolish, but he was dangerous.

He guessed that these fellows were not much good, sensed that something was wrong and wondered what. In cow camps and ranch houses where he had paused in heading for Nelplaid, he had heard that it was pretty wild country.

It made Red mad if even his best friends said that he nosed about looking for trouble, or that he carried a chip on his shoulder; but he did have a stubborn way of not backing up from people who seemed to want to be disagreeable. When people stared at him, he stared back.

Four of these men were dusty unshaven rough fellows, with a wary tenseness behind attitudes of careless slouching.

A fifth stood just inside the doorway with an apron about his belly. He had a large black mustache, a fat red face, and a half smoked dead cigar in his mouth. He made Red think of a big spider that had turned saloon keeper. A man that made him think of a fat spider was to be regarded unfavorably.

The four rough fellows were examining Red much as town dogs take a look at a stray; but their looks kept going on by him toward the front of the general store, then would snap back and seemed to size him up with some symptoms of derision. The blue eyes made him look much more like a kid than he was; and he was weighted down with two big guns and a lot of cartridges.

Red stared back with much the air of asking, "Well, just what is there about me that you fellows don't like?"

He stared longest at a tall man with hatchet-thin face, squinty-tight eyes, very small hands, and a white scar on the side of his cheek as if he had been

kicked by a horse or hit by knucks. This fellow seemed to be the leader. He squinted beadily at Red as if wanting to make him a little uneasy. But it didn't work out that way. Red bristled up and stared back.

The squinty man slouched forward and asked in a cold, mean way, "Was you lookin' for somebody—in particular?"

"I come to town to find Judge Trowbridge. You happen to know where he is?"

The squinty-eyed man frowned. Red had a soft sound, just as if he hadn't noticed that he was being stared at by a man who wasn't used to being stared back at.

Then the spider-shaped saloon keeper, with the apron about his belly, thrust out his short neck from beside the doorway. He had a smooth voice with a throaty rumble, and said a little hurriedly, "The judge is three or four doors down and upstairs." The dead cigar waggled in a pointing hand.

There was urgency in the gesture as if bidding Red be on his way.

Just then one of the slouching fellows said in a kind of startled quick way, as if giving a signal, "There he is!'

All the four fellows stiffened, moved, changing position a little and doing it quick. One man showed that he had a game knee by the limpy jump he made to get to the edge of the narrow board sidewalk, his hand going toward the gun's butt. But it was plain that they weren't making a dead set for Red. Their eyes were fixed on the platform before the general store.

A big man in a big gray hat had come out. He wore high boots without spurs and dark corduroy pants. Red couldn't see the man's face for his back was turned as he held open the screen door with the reach of a thick arm.

Just as a girl was following him through the door, shots were fired.

The girl faced about, a scream in her mouth, then she jumped back.

The big man turned, staggered into more bullets, and his broken right arm groped uselessly for the gun on his hip. He fell to his knees, jerked left-handedly to get at the gun, but sagged over, thumped down with the dull heaviness of a big-bodied man whose legs have given way, his face toward the fellows who were trying to kill him. It was a big dark bulldog face with bulging jaws.

The girl had jumped back inside the door, then she came back with a rush that hit the screen with all her weight, banging it wide. She cried, "Daddy!" and threw herself down protectively before the wounded man who lay still, as if dead.

At the first shot Red had jumped aside. It wasn't his fight and he had been through enough smoke to know that bystanders are unlucky. One look, and he saw the big man go down shot in the back, heard the girl's scream; then Red's hands moved like darting shadows toward his guns.

"Damn your souls!" he yelled as his lean body snapped back to the backward jerk of his hands. The right hand gun barely cleared the top of the holster when it threw a slug into the stiff-kneed man's belly, right above the belt buckle.

The man pitched forward with both hands up as if in a futile gesture of surrender, then sprawled with a sidelong lurch, face down, in the dust beside the narrow boardwalk.

Red had gone into a point-blank fight with four men who had their guns out and smoking; but he was the gun-trained son of a man who had been one of the West's great sheriffs. And he had the advantage of surprising these killers by jumping them so suddenly; the greater advantage of being cool and quick, and so good a shot that when he had fired three times two men were down.

The second to go was a chunky fellow who laid his back against the 'dobe front of the saloon and slid down with an air of drunken sleepiness.

Dust from bullets splattered in the street behind Red as if hit by hail stones, but he leaned into the smoke, a gun in each hand. His right elbow was pressed against his side, hip-shooting; and the long-barreled .45 in his left hand was up and balanced, ready to go the moment the other was empty. There weren't many men anywhere who could shoot a single-action as fast as Red. His father had nearly worn off the boy's thumbs teaching him to snap back that hammer the instant it fell.

The horses were tossing their heads, the whites in their eyes gleaming with a half angered fear as they sidled about, scuffing the dust, but they stood to their reins. That is, all the horses but Red's Black Devil showed excitement, and he threw up his head, poked out his ears, with a kind of anxious look. Red had used up a lot of powder training the black horse to think that there really wasn't much difference between flies and bullets.

Both of the other men were backing up as if blown by the muzzle-blasts of the long barreled .45 toward the Silver Dollar's doorway, wanting shelter. The tall squinty-eyed man had an amazed and pretty much scared look on his hatchet-thin face, and he was sagging over as if trying to ease a pain in his side. Twice he pulled the trigger after his gun was empty; then he dropped it and made a hobbling jump, as if crippled, toward the plunging horses at the hitch rack.

A heavy door swung from the shadows inside the Silver Dollar and closed with a jar, shutting out the other man who was backing into shelter. However fast Red shot, and he had a thumb and finger that could spin a cylinder, he always knew when a gun was empty and never snapped on a dead shell. It wasn't that he exactly counted his shots, but something inside of him kept track; and the second gun was out and ready to go. His first left-handed shot slapped into the third man's breast; and down he came with his gun out at arm's length. He fired along the level of the sidewalk, knocking splatters out of one of the hitching rack's uprights. Then he slumped over, quiet.

Red leaned forward, watching out for tricks. Badmen had a way of playing possum. Then Red staggered and fell to a knee as a horse almost struck against him. The squinty-eyed man, hugging the saddle drunkenly, rode across the sidewalk and spurred down the five foot space between the walls of the saloon and the general store.

THERE was a lot of silence when the guns stopped. Red stood with a surprised and uncertain air of wondering what he had got himself into. Shooting down men he didn't know anything about was a ticklish thing in a town where he didn't have any friends, at least more of a friend than old Judge Trowbridge.

But Red looked toward the front of the store where the girl was on her knees, hovering over the big man, and he felt satisfied. To his way of thinking, these men had sure needed killing.

Knocked over three and hurt the fourth, he thought grimly but satisfied—almost. He wished he had got the fourth, who had run, crippled. He had been raised to think that killers, outlaws, rustlers, horse-thieves and such, were no better than four-legged wolves; and when it came to "badmen" of any shape, size, or age, he felt that it was right and proper to knock them over. His own father had been killed by one who shot from the back.

Red stayed in his tracks and began to reload his guns. There was no telling what might happen next, and an unloaded gun wasn't of much use, except as a club and some people had heads that might hurt the barrel. As he deftly prodded out the empty shells and replaced them with bullets from his belt,

he looked all about, and his glance went from one after another of the men who were dead.

Red fastened his look on something in the board sidewalk and took a step or two toward it. He half grinned as if he didn't want to grin, then rapidly looked at the boots of the men who lay sprawled out. The fourth man that Red thought he had crippled must not have been hit at all. He had lost his high boot heel in a knot hole, and that made him sag, gave him a limp.

The twenty seconds of gun-crash had stirred up the town. Heads were coming out of doorways, turning loose inquiring shouts, excitedly loud. The shooting had been heard from all over town. Two scared men in shirt sleeves edged out of the general store, looked to make sure that the shooting was all over, then rushed to where the pretty girl was down on her knees. The older man, with frizzled gray hair and a storekeeper's bib apron about his neck, cried brokenly, "They killed Mr. Clayton!"

Red spun about with hand dangling backward toward a holstered gun as a man with a rifle in his hands ran at him from across the street. His blue eyes narrowed in a hard look, although he guessed that this tall broad-shouldered fellow was not unfriendly, else he would have stayed in the boot-maker's shop across the way and used his rifle from the doorway.

He was a big fellow with a hard face, but had a rather rollicking handsome look to him; and when he stopped stock-still in front of Red he smiled soberly.

"Who in hell are you?" But he looked away, glancing at the three dead men, then stared toward the narrow passage between store and saloon walls through which the horseman had galloped. He stared at the crowd gathering on the store's front platform.

Red was not sure he liked this man. He didn't like so much finery. It wasn't cheap finery and it looked worn. There were a silver studded band about the wide hat, stamped leather holsters, long chased spurs, and the sort of soft-leather chaps, lined with silver, that didn't belong in a proper cowboy's outfit. He too, wore two revolvers—walnut handled. Red noticed that particularly. Real gunfighters shied usually from ivory handles. Also he carried a rifle.

"Who in hell are you?" he asked again, and sounded approving.

Red said, "Who are they?"

The man didn't blink but seemed about to blink. "I don't know." He spoke quickly. He didn't have a hard voice. It was sort of smooth, like the voice of a man who knows how to talk to women easily. "I don't know who the hell they are. But I knew they were up to something. I followed them to town and watched from over there."

Red said, "If you was so ready, why didn't you chip in?"

"But I couldn't. The horses were in the way—and you! You were the only one in plain sight!"

"There was a man on horseback out plain enough!"

"God, yes! I'd have given an arm to knock him out of the saddle. But I watched *you*. When you nearly fell I thought you had been shot. He was away and had angled in between the buildings before I could turn loose. But you hit him, didn't you?"

"No." Red pointed. "He lost his boot heel in a knot hole. Maybe he thought he was crippled. Acted like it!"

The man laughed jerkily, as if somehow he thought it was a better joke than he could let on. It was a short quick laugh. Then he looked worried as he turned again toward the store. He faced Red. "Are you one of Mr. Clayton's men?"

"Me, no. I'm Red Clark of Tulluco and I just rode in."

The man had brown eyes. They glowed at Red. "I've seen men shoot. You're fast! And accurate!"

"I sure try to be," Red admitted sort of absently, still trying to size up this fellow.

"How'd you come to get into the fight? When it wasn't your affair?"

"Listen, you! Any time some men—any men and I don't care who!—shoot a gun on purpose toward where a woman is, it's my affair and I figger on takin' part to make 'em wish they hadn't!"

The man's good looking face broke into an open mouthed grin. He poked out a hand impulsively. "We are friends!" Somehow he seemed trying to make Red think that being friends with him was an honor not offered everybody.

"Maybe," said Red, "I'll need me some friends if these fellers are mourned like they ortn't be!"

"My name's Brady. You done a good job. I wish I helped. You'll need friends, though, if you stay in this country. That was Mell Barber that got away!"

Red snapped, "Thought you didn't know 'em?"

Brady's handsome face setted into an expression just about as if he had been caught with an ace up his sleeve. He looked a little startled and all of a sudden slightly mean. But Brady changed his look to a smile, shook his head. "I know who he is. That's all." He pulled at Red's arm. "Come along and let's see if the old man is dead."

TOWN people had gathered fast, talking loud and in wonderment, with something of the muddled confusion of movement that ants have when their nest is poked by a stick. They didn't quite know what had happened.

Brady pushed through to where the girl was on her knees, dipping a handkerchief into a bucket of water that had been brought. She was sopping the unconscious man's face.

Brady stopped. "Is he dead, Kate?"

The girl gave a jump as if scared, turned up her face. "Oh Jim!" Something about him had scared her, but Red was pretty sure that she wanted to throw her arms about this Brady and have him throw his arms about her. Then she stood up and pushed at Brady, said in a low hurried way, "You mustn't stay here!" Then, "Did you—them—did you?"

Brady looked regretful, as if he wanted to lie a little, and moved his head. "It wasn't me, Kate. It was—"

Red could tell that Brady was getting ready to speak up and tell just how it happened, but the girl looked scared again. "You must go, Jim!" Her voice was low and urgent. "You must!" She pushed hard. She was small and dainty; and he was a big fellow, but he yielded as if she were strong.

Men, and women too, were shoving about Red and he let himself be jostled aside. Nelplaid was a dinky town of probably two or three hundred people; but everybody was coming, yelping questions; mostly, "Who done it?" and all talking at once.

The fight had happened out on Main Street, but it was less than half a minute from the time of the first shot at Mr. Clayton to the last from the dying man near Red's feet; and nobody, at least nobody who was doing the talking, had a clear idea of what was what. Scarcely anybody excepting Brady and the fat saloon keeper who had crawled into his hole and shut the door had seen a thing.

People didn't even seem sure who the dead men were. There was confused talk that old Sam Clayton had downed the fellows after they had shot him. To Red's ears it sounded as if people thought that Mr. Clayton was just the kind of a man who would do that sort of thing; yet somehow there was more respect than liking in the way they used Sam Clayton's name. Some were even so far wrong that they were saying that the man with the rifle had knocked the fellows over, but nobody appeared to know even his name.

Red stood on tiptoes and craned his neck to get another look at this Brady and the girl, especially at the girl because he liked her; not so much merely because she was a pretty girl as because of the way she had come out of that door and flung herself down protectively across the wounded man.

Red was bumped by a short fat bald man in a long-tailed coat, a white shirt and no collar, who was pressing in with an air of authority. He called, "Judge!" but the bare-headed man didn't hear and shoved his way through close to where Mr. Clayton was and took charge.

The Judge was a queer sort of fellow, but he had a way of taking charge when he wanted to. He was short and fat with a red bald head and always wore a long black coat even in mid-summer. Red suspected that when he got up at night he slipped the long tailed black coat over his nightshirt. The Judge played lots of poker, drank lots of good whisky, read lots of books, especially poetry; but he was an honest man and nobody could scare him although he never went armed; not even when he had been judge up at Tulluco and the friends of some men threatened, and sometimes tried, to kill him. Red liked the Judge a lot, but the Judge did have a weakness for hesitating to believe in the downright meanness of people. People had lied out of things easily, unless there were a lot of contradictory witnesses, when the Judge had been on the bench up at Tulluco.

Red could hear the Judge's powerful resonant voice above all the chatter, calling upon people to stand back. The Judge had the kind of voice that made a wonderful Fourth of July oration; and ordinarily he was plain-spoken, but when he unlimbered he hitched words up together that made them roll and sway and sound fine, and Red sometimes wondered what they meant.

The Judge was telling the mild gray owner of the store to have some blankets spread on the floor to lay Mr. Clayton on until he could be moved. He told somebody else to ride out of town to where the doctor had gone to see a sick woman.

Red was tired and dusty, and there didn't seem anything better to do than find the Judge's office, go in and sit down. Pretty soon the crowd would begin to get the straight of the story, and men would stare and ask questions. "Three or four doors down and upstairs," the fat saloon keeper had said. "And how he acted as if he knowed what was coming," Red reflected.

There was only one two-story building in the block. Red went up stairs with jingle of spurs, clump of heels, on the uncarpeted boards. It was dark from lack of windows in the hall and nothing to show which was the Judge's room. He knocked on two or three doors, then

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tried one at the front, found it unlocked, and looked in.

Books, more than two or three people could read in a lifetime, Red thought, were on shelves and others were stacked on a table. The dusty windows looked down on the street. A bottle of whisky and a tumbler were on the table with pipes and a stone jar of tobacco. This was where the Judge lived, all right. The books weren't law books and the whisky wasn't rye.

Red unbuckled his guns and took a second drink. He sat down in the old worn chair with the head rest tilted back. After the long day's ride it was fine to sit and rest, so he put his hat on his knee, took a deep breath, relaxed drowsily.

RED awakened with a start, found himself in darkness and for a second or two couldn't quite figure where he was as the door opened and a slow heavy tread moved into the room; then, " 'Lo, Judge!"

"Eh? Well, and who are you?"

"Write a feller a letter to come and see you, then you ask his name! When I was a kid I seen ever'body have to do like you said, even when you said for 'em to go get hung! So here I am."

The Judge puffed a few chuckles. The stairs had made him breathe hard.

"I never thought of your being here, although I have inquired and wondered where you had gone." A match flared, a pudgy hand moved above the flame and took off a lamp chimney. The flame touched the wick. Judge Trowbridge gazed at Red with benign severity. "I knew you were in town."

"Who told you? That Brady feller?"

"Brady? I don't know anyone by the name of Brady."

"Then how you know? I told only him who I was."

The Judge plucked a red bandanna from the tail pocket of his long coat. He wiped his face and bald head, and gouged in under the collarless shirt. All the while he scrutinized Red as if looking for changes in the lean brown muscular face between the last time he had seen him and now. He shook his head as if he didn't see any changes worth commenting on.

"How did I know? There was a horse at the hitching rack branded with the Arrowhead. There were three dead men —most deservedly dead!—and a red-headed stranger in town, so—"

"That makes me think. I got to go 'tend to my horse. His name is Devil, which he ain't, being the best horse the Lord ever let a plain onery puncher like me set on!"

"I sent him down to the stable, son." The Judge took a deep breath, parted the tails of his coat, sat down, rested his plump hands on his knees, looked very dignified as he gazed at Red. He shook his head, solemnly. "Red, my boy, I dread to think of the results if your hasty impulsiveness ever makes a mistake in judgment!"

"I made one mistake. I let a feller get away!"

"The three of them that didn't get away were laid out on the floor of Dave Gridger's saloon and their wounds inspected." The Judge wiped about his collarless neck where the fat lay in folds. He cleared his throat. "You are uncommonly spry with a gun, Red."

Red grunted, not wanting to be lectured.

"And lucky," the Judge added.

" 'Course, Judge, they is some luck if you don't get hit. But hittin' what you shoot at ain't much luck. I," Red explained gravely, "don't jerk my trigger, which took a lot of practice not to do, 'specially when you're in a hurry."

The Judge picked up a pipe, examined it thoughtfully, lifted the lid of the stone jar. "Mr. Clayton is a big cattleman of Nelplaid. The big cattleman. He has many enemies. Some people complain that he is overbearing. Of late years he

has become suspicious of everybody. Even lately, I understand, of his own son. And disagreeable toward his neighbors. Rustlers have preyed on his herds and he has found it impossible to check them. There has never been a conviction for rustling in Nelplaid County. The public's sympathy is not with the big cattlemen."

Red leaned forward, poked out a finger. "Why don't Mr. Clayton hire hisself some good men and burn them rustlers' tails with a little powder smoke?"

The Judge sighed. "Old Sam Clayton is a hard man to get on with. Men don't stay with him long. Of late years he has lacked ability to inspire the kind of loyalty that I remember the boys were accustomed to give the cattlemen of Tulluco and adjacent counties." The Judge sighed again. "I like old Sam." As he meditated he sent a cloud of smoke like a misty halo about his big round bald head.

"Who was them fellers that shot 'im?"

"Nobody knows for certain. It is said they are members of the Kilco bunch, and Dave Gridger declares that he never saw them before, and Dave knows more people than almost anybody."

"An' probably tells more lies," Red suggested. "He looks fat an' onery. Did you by happenchance send for me to work for Mr. Clayton?"

"Oh, no, no. No." The Judge drew with a *plop-plop* of lips on his pipe. "I sent for you to come and take charge of a little ranch called the Lazy Z. It was owned by a man named Alvord. Much to my discomfort and peace of mind, I am administrator of the Alvord estate, which consists of this little ranch." The Judge frowned, spoke with a rumbling troubled voice. "I don't know just what the trouble is out there. For some reason the men I put in charge won't stay. Now I have a man named Frank Knox in charge. I am not quite satisfied about Knox. Perhaps I misjudge the man. He appears willing enough to stay, but I fear his reputation isn't just what it ought to be. So sitting here one day, I said to myself, 'I know one boy that I would like to have in charge out there.' And I wrote you. And you hadn't been in town ten minutes before—just how did you come to get into that fight, Red?"

Red hunched forward with the cigarette smoldering in his fingers. "You know where I was hatched and how I growed up, Judge. You know that since I was fourteen I've drawed man-sized wages from outfits that, in a way of speaking, rode with a gun in their hands. Well, they shot this Mr. Clayton in the back with some of his women folks lookin' on. They needed a first class lesson in some good manners and got 'er!"

The Judge didn't smile. He knew that Red had a way of sounding flippant and of being earnest, and that most of the time he didn't even know that he sounded flippant. He let go with words just about as he let go with his guns. The Judge took up another pipe, filled it from the stone jar.

"Old Sam himself says that he doesn't know those men, and so can't understand why they—"

"That man Brady knows 'em."

"Brady? Who is Brady?"

"He said his name was Brady. He told me he follered 'em to town. He was across the street, watchin' and ready to help, but me and the horses was in the way. So he said."

"Brady? Brady?" The Judge raised his eyebrows, reflecting. "I don't know him."

"That daughter of Mr. Clayton sure knowed him and—"

"She is Mr. Clayton's granddaughter."

"She called him 'Daddy'."

"She is his granddaughter, and for all of her dainty appearance she is more of a Clayton than Mr. Clayton's own son. But she is exceedingly—um—well, what you know as 'stuck-up'. She was edu-

cated in the East and that is seldom good for anybody that comes into the West to live."

"She is all right," said Red. "She can be stuck up. I don't care if she never even says 'Howdy' to me. I like her. Education ain't spoiled her so that she is easy scairt. She has got more grit than a man, but then most women has when you go monkeyin' with their men folks. I like her fine!"

The old Judge puffed contemplatively, wondering if this wild-headed boy had fallen in love suddenly with the aloof, chilly, slightly arrogant and presumably vain Miss Clayton. Such foolishness came to every boy on his way up to manhood; and sometimes after he had attained manhood and ought to know better.

"What," asked Red, "about this ranch of yourn?"

"The heir is one J. C. Alvord who lives in Boston. He had written me that the ranch is not for sale. Mr. Clayton has tried for years to buy it. Some of the old Alvord stubbornness, it appears, is in the heir, too. And he has written that just as soon as he can put his affairs in order, he will come out and take charge."

"What he know about cows?"

"Nothing, of course." The Judge puckered his brow with a discouraged frown. "His handwriting is very precise and small."

"What that mean?" Red had a way of often clipping his sentences to an ungrammatical nakedness, as well as often padding his remarks with a roundabout gabbiness.

"It is symptomatic of a certain overrefinedness, scarcely suitable to ranch life."

"That 'sympto' thingamagig—it is something like simpleton, um?"

"Very likely to be in this case. In fact, I have detected even a lavenderish sachet fragrance about the letter paper."

"Perfume? Me, I won't ride for no man that uses perfume. I just won't. I think it fine on girls. But a man—he can go hunt himself another cowboy!"

"But I am not asking you to ride for him. I am asking you to ride for me. I am responsible for the ranch until the owner comes. And the fact is, Red, that I have reasons for believing that rustlers are making away with Alvord cattle."

"How many cows you run?"

"Between eight hundred and a thousand."

Red snorted. "Hell, a one-legged man on foot orta be able to keep them on their range. How many men you got out there?"

"Four. But one—"

"Four?"

"Well, really three. But even two of those are youngsters whose parents I used to know. They drifted into Nelplaid looking for jobs and I sent them out there. And Frank Knox. I put him in charge after two other men had quit. I thought that a man who had cattle of his own in the hills and knew the country ought to be able to handle things. But I don't believe Knox is suitable. In fact, Mr. Clayton himself told me that Knox was not to be trusted. True, Sam is very suspicious. But I have heard other things. I sent for you. I want you to go out there as boss."

"What's mostly wrong?"

"It is mountainous country and filled with rustlers."

"You said four men?"

"One is the cook. He doesn't get wages, but stays on. He and Alvord batched together for years. If you don't want him, run him off."

"If he cooks good, I won't."

"Will you go, Red?"

"I don't know about mountain ranches."

"It is a beautiful ranch."

"Um. I don't care about that. Only when I ride for an outfit, it just the same as belongs to me as far as makin' other people keep their hands off. And if the owner don't back me up, I quit."

"I don't know what the owner is like, but until he comes, I will back you up."

"How much wages do I get?"

"How much do you think you ought to get?"

"Well," said Red, studying the ceiling, "when I was range boss up in Tahzo, I got me forty and they throwed in that colt that turned into the horse you saw when I quit. Of course, a big part of my job up there was gettin' shot at. Rustlers was peevish at me on account of so many range bosses havin' a way of going in cahoots with 'em."

"Some of my managers have been shot at. Knox, also, I understand. But *he* stays on."

"Me," Red explained, "I won't be friends with rustlers and such. I just won't. So up in Tahzo, old Jake Dunham paid me good wages on account of tangling horns with fellers that thought they was badmen. But I never yet seen a badman that wouldn't curl up and be quiet if you plugged him in the belly. I don't reckon this Nelplaid country can stack up alongside of how bad Tahzo was. So as for wages—I'll leave it to you. Work ortn't be very hard."

"But it is a mountain ranch. There is a rich watered valley, but the cows wander off into the mountains."

"Oh they do, do they?" Red asked. "They must be funny cows." The Judge frowned inquiringly. "To go roaming up among trees and rocks when they've got grass and water under their noses."

"As for pay—" The Judge pursed his lips about the pipe stem, *plopped* them a few times. "It will be fifty a month. And if you stay there, you will earn it, son."

THE Judge put on his celluloid collar, poked in a little store-tied black bow, brushed his long tailed coat and black hat. "Now, Red, we will go eat."

They were late in the Saginaw restaurant and had the small dimly lighted dining room to themselves, being waited on by a scrawny man whose broad suspenders tugged at his too-big pants. He was a widower with a small son and a Chinese cook, waiting table himself and helping in the kitchen. By way of keeping them company, he took a chair at the table and leaned on his elbows. B. Blanton, Prop., as the crooked lettering said on the front. B. Blanton, Prop., was recently from the East and did not like the hot dry West.

Red went on eating after the Judge had had enough. B. Blanton stared at Red in respectful curiosity. It was now known that Red had knocked over the three men and sent a fourth riding out of town.

"I don't see how you done it," Blanton droned. "I don't see how you missed gettin' kilt!"

Talk made Red uncomfortable, and it irritated him almost as much to be made out a hero as to be made out a badman. He poked into his mouth a piece of steak that would have done very well to resole a boot, and mumbled, "Oh me, bein' skinny, I'm as hard to hit as a card edge-ways."

"Them fellers' friends'll lay for you, mister," said Blanton, gazing at Red as if picturing him laid out for burial. "Ain't you scairt they'll get you?"

"Oh yeah, you bet. Sure." Red drank deep of black coffee into which he had stirred four spoonfuls of gritty sugar.

"Then I reckon you'll git outa town, soon?"

"Me? Sure. That's right. First thing in the mornin'."

A small freckled barefoot boy dashed in as if blown by a whirlwind. He was saying "Bang! Bang! Bang!" and a corn cob in his hand was the gun. When he saw that there were customers he stopped with an embarrassed look as if he had swallowed his tongue; then with shy friendliness, said, "Hello, Judge," and stood with a saucer-eyed stare at Red. He asked in an awed whisper, "Is that *him?*"

"Red," said the Judge gravely, "this is my small friend, Jody Blanton, who came west from Saginaw, Michigan, to grow into a cowboy."

Red grinned at the kid. Jody snuggled in under the Judge's arm with an elfin stare at Red. "Dave he says that Mr. Clayton was shot by accident while them men was fightin' you!"

"Eh?" asked the Judge.

"He says," Jody went on, breathlessly encouraged because the grown-ups looked so interested, "that you rode in and the shootin' started all of a sudden."

Red grunted and took a piece of dried apple pie in his fingers, bit into it, spoke as he chewed. "Is that Dave the feller with the black mustache and big belly?"

"To whom was he telling that, Jody?" asked the Judge.

"To the sheriff."

"How did you happen to hear?"

"He is the dangest boy to hear things!" said Mr. Blanton with pride.

"Me, I play I'm scout and Injun-fighter," Jody explained. "Some times I sneak in the back of Dave's place and hide there under a table where it is dark and I play-like I am—"

"Jody," Red told him, "you are goin' to be a great cowboy. A cowboy, he has to have ears funnel-shaped, like mine. One of these days when I buy me a cow, I'll hire you to ride herd on 'er. Most likely you'll be well-growed before I get me that cow because nearly everybody I know plays poker better'n I do."

After supper, on the way back to the Judge's rooms, Red shortened his stride with stumble of high heels and dragging rattle of spurs to the Judge's short legs.

"No, no, Red, I can't believe that Dave Gridger knew what those men were up to. He is a man of—well. His brother-in-law is the sheriff and—"

"I seen how he acted. The kid told you how he talked. This Dave is a liar and not smart."

"He is regarded as a very smart man in Nelplaid County. Very smart!"

"No man gets shot three times in the back, like Mr. Clayton was, accidental. Nobody is smart who says so!"

"Jody is only a child and perhaps misunderstood when he overheard them talking."

Red grunted, skeptically. "Next, maybe he'll be sayin' I shot Mr. Clayton myself and them fellers lit into me for doin' it!"

"Old Sam saw you go into action, Red."

"And this sheriff can't be much good his own self."

"Why, son, I believe that Sheriff Mattern is a thoroughly honest man, although he is lacking in certain qualities that are desirable in a sheriff."

"Like courage, maybe? And not catchin' outlaws and such?"

"He is very careful not to offend voters, I must admit."

"He your friend?"

"We aren't unfriendly. But I am not in politics. I am satisfied with a little private practice, my books, and a friendly game of poker in the evening. A few of us play in the back of the general store. Would you care to take a hand? You will find my friends there."

"Me, poker with you old longhorns? I'll go up and sleep in your place like you said I could. I'm lightin' out for the ranch at sun-up. And sleep is one of the things I am a tophand at doin'."

RED went up the stairs, lit the lamp, put his hat on the floor, rolled a cigarette and sat down. He laid the cigarette aside, pulled off his boots, stretched his toes, and lay back wondering what it was going to be like at the Lazy Z; wondered about saving his wages and buying some cows to grow himself a herd; and so mused drowsily, watching the herd grow.

The cows vanished as he grinned at himself. A fellow worked to have money to spend; and if he saved it, it was just

the same as if he didn't have it. Besides, a fellow couldn't get mad and quit if he was his own boss!

So Red began to think of other things, especially of the spider-fat Dave Gridger. Said Red to himself, "I ought to be as good a scout and Injun-fighter as that kid is." He meditated a while, then picked up his boots and removed the spurs.

Outside the sky was clear and starry and lamplight lay in a few open doorways along the street, glowed in some dirty windows. There were not many people on the street and Red kept to the dark places as he went around back and moved up along behind the buildings.

The rear windows of the general store were lighted and raised. He could hear the rattle of chips, the muffled mumble of amiable voices; but the windows were above his head and he could not see without going up on the rear platform.

He edged up to the back of the Silver Dollar. The door was open and a dim coal oil lamp, the wick turned low, burned against the wall at the back.

Like most cowtown saloons, this was a big room with a long bar, a few tables and many chairs; and most of the year it had a barn-like emptiness. But when the boys swarmed in after the spring and fall roundups, and lined two and three deep at the bar, and stood around waiting for a chance to sit in a poker game, proprietors wished that their saloons were bigger.

He had come hoping to have Jody's luck at overhearing something; but there was nobody in back. The six or seven men, lolling against the bar up front, talked so quietly that their voices were a broken splatter of sound with now and then a few stressed words. Brighter lamps were up there, and the yellowish glow threw a bobble of shadows on the wall across the room. The man behind the bar was not the same that Red had seen in the doorway that afternoon.

Red edged into the saloon to be nearer the voices that had the dragging listlessness of men who were still talking of what they had been talking of for hours. It would be talked about for days, remembered for years. The biggest liar of an old-timer couldn't top the story of a gunfight in which a lone red-headed young stranger downed three men and ran a fourth out of town. Red wanted to know if they were saying that Mr. Clayton had been shot accidentally, but he could not hear much more than a mumble.

He had an ear cocked forward intently when he heard steps in the alleyway back of the saloon; and he realized that if somebody entered through the rear door that he would be found standing there like a prowler unless he went on up to the bar; and there he would be eyed and talked to by strangers who were full of questions. He had to do something quickly, so he copied Injun-fighter Jody by stepping light-toed to a table and scrouging under it, down on his knees.

Somebody came through the back door with scuff of heels and jingle of spurs, but instead of passing along up to the bar, he walked to a table at the back of the saloon where the dim lamp was burning, so that he would be sitting practically in darkness, pulled out a chair, and dropped heavily into it.

Red, down awkwardly on his knees, not ten feet away, felt silly. He was more or less caught in a trap because he hadn't expected the man to sit down back here. He had thought the fellow would just pass on. Now if he tried to get out from under the table and stand up he would be seen and quite properly asked to explain what kind of a game he was up to; which would surely make the new boss of the Lazy Z look foolish. So he crouched as low as he could and peered between the rungs of a chair at the man whose face was lighted by the dim wall lamp.

The man's hat was tipped back. He was pretty good sized, with muscular shoulders and a thick neck, a somewhat sullen face, not old. The face showed up more clearly when he lit a cigar. The cigar was almost a sure sign of being a cattleman instead of merely a cowboy. The man did not look happy. "Down at the nose," was Red's way of putting it.

Not much of a cattleman either in Red's critical eyes, for there was a lumpish gold ring on the man's hand, a heavy watch chain with a heavy charm, and the man's gun had ivory butts. Red did not like ivory butts; did not much respect men whose guns had them.

A tall man in a stiff-brimmed hat came through the door up front, moved his hand in a greeting as he passed men at the bar, spoke affably, but came along back toward the rear as if he knew who was waiting. There was the glimmer of a silver star on the man's vest. Before he sat down the sullen man who was waiting asked, "Where's Dave?"

"Dave had some little business, but will be along." This man with the silver star talked as if he had a little dab of hot mush in his mouth.

The sullen man took the cigar out of his mouth as if about to say something, then put it back, bit hard.

"Bill, I sure wish I'd been in town when it happened!" said the man with the star.

The sullen man growled, "Yes, I know, Sheriff."

So this was the sheriff. He had straight shoulders, but a rabbit look to his face, which meant not much chin.

"I just been over to see about your father, Bill. I feel all broke up."

Bill said sullenly, "How do you think I feel?"

" 'Course now, you feel terrible!"

Bill took the cigar in the hand that had the lumpish gold ring and hit the table. "That Red Clark orta be arrested!"

The sheriff made little sounds as if trying to soothe Bill. "Why now, Bill, I'd think you would feel mighty kindly toward this Red fellow!"

Bill put the cigar back in his mouth and his fist hit the table again. "He rode in here and got in a fight with some men and my old man was hit by their bullets! That's how Dave seen it, and he was watching!"

The sheriff pushed up his hat and rubbed his cheek, looked at Bill with an air of wondering. "Well now, Bill, Dave he was purty excited, I reckon. Nobody but that scrubby hoss doctor can get to see your father, him and Miss Kate. But Miss Kate, she told me that she don't know *just* what did happen, but she says that old Sam says that Clark boy pitched into them fellers after they started shootin'. She says that old Sam says he is goin' to have that Clark boy workin' for 'im if he has to give him a herd and free range. So nobody can go arrestin' him, Bill. If old Sam don't die he would raise hell about it." The sheriff added in a hurt tone, "And your father has sorta got it in for me, anyhow. And Dave too. But you know, Bill, how I never shrink from my duty."

Bill set the cigar in one corner of his mouth, then switched it over to the other corner. He looked sullenly sick, as a man naturally would when his father was perhaps about to die. Red did not blame him for misunderstanding about the shooting. Bill's voice sounded a little queer, even a bit shaky, as he asked, "Do folks know yet who them men are?"

The sheriff removed his hat and ran his fingers around the stiff brim as if looking for something that might be hidden there. "Miss Kate says—and it is like having your nose frost-bit to talk to her!—that they were Mell Barber's men. Since him and Kilco had their fallin' out, I reckon Mell Barber wants to show just how bad he can be!"

"That can't be so!" Bill sounded sullenly angered and nervous, too. "How

could one man, and a sort of kid at that, I hear, down four hard-shootin' men?"

The sheriff cautiously said, "Um-m. Folks has said that you and Mell Barber ain't teetotal strangers, Bill."

"Folks can keep their damn mouths shut!"

"They don't, though. And about that Clark boy—the old Judge told me himself that he had give lead poison to a lot of bad men."

Bill had a sick-looking glower.

"I don't want to be what they call impertinent, Bill. But you have now and then bumped into some of the Kilco and Barber fellers, ain't you?"

"Only like other people when they was drinkin' and gamblin' over at Poicoma."

"And you didn't recognize any of them dead ones?"

"No!" said Bill, sounding angry. "No, I didn't. Never saw 'em before." He stood up in a kind of nervous hurry. "I'm goin' next door where the Judge is and ask him myself about this Clark. You tell Dave where I am."

Bill went out of the back door and

Red, down awkwardly on his knees, felt silly. . . .

the sheriff sat there looking at the door as if his thoughts were following Bill.

Red felt that the lesson he had taken from Injun-fighting Jody was helping; so he stayed quiet, waiting for Dave to come.

Dave came through the front of the saloon, waddled up for a friendly chat with a man here and there, told the bartender to set up drinks, then waddled on back and took the chair Bill Clayton had just left.

Dave was even fatter than Red had remembered. Hog fat and bulge-bellied. His black mustache was as thick as a pair of thumbs stuck to his lip, and looked as shiny as if it had been rubbed with stove blacking. He had a straight-brimmed hat, too, just like the sheriff's —as if they bought their hats together to get a reduction in price.

Dave took off his hat and rubbed his forehead with the heel of his palm.

"Bill he went to the store to ask the Judge about that Clark fellow. He was askin' me if I was goin' to arrest 'im."

Dave grunted, looked sour. "Don't you try it."

"When my duty calls, I don't get scairt," said the sheriff, straightening his shoulders as if having a picture taken.

Dave growled, "You poke your fingers in your ears when duty starts talkin' about that hombre, or your widow'll be hanging on my neck."

"I told Bill we couldn't arrest him, not after how Sam says the boy pitched in to help."

"I know. I know," Dave growled, meditatively and troubled. "But Sam's back was turned and Kate was in the store when the shootin' started. Old Sam happened to be right in line of fire as they opened up."

"Who started the ruckus, then?"

"That Clark boy!" Dave broke off and turned his head. "What's that?"

The sheriff looked around startled. Chairs seemed moving in the dimness and the table shifted as if by itself; then a lanky shape rose up off the darkness on the floor and a voice said:

"Me, I'm Red Clark and you're a liar!"

The sheriff bobbed in his chair a little as if to jump up, but all he could do was to say, "Here—here now—here, what's the meanin' of this?"

Dave half crooked his thick fat arms, getting his palms up and out. "I ain't armed!"

Red rocked back on his heels. "They opened up on old Sam Clayton and you saw 'em. So why you want to lie like that for?"

The sheriff moved his feet but stayed where he was. Dave swallowed a couple of times as if to get a scared feeling out of his throat.

"Now, now, boy! I just told it as it looked to me. And the Claytons are my friends. I haven't a thing in the world against you, boy. So why would I make up a story like that?"

"That," Red snapped, "is what I come to find out. *Why did you?*"

The sheriff made some hazy sounds as if he thought that he ought to take part on account of his badge; but he ended merely by clearing his throat.

Dave wiped his forehead with a palm, spoke oozy and gutturally. "Now boy, if I have made a mistake—"

"Big 'un! Talkin' behind my back like that!"

"Well then, boy, you just set down here and let's talk it over."

"You bet we'll talk it over—only not here! We all will go next door where the Judge and some folks is. We'll talk before them and have us a showdown!"

The sheriff moved his feet some more. "That is a good idea, Dave."

Dave said, "I'd rather talk here."

Red's hand moved; and Dave said, quick and anxious, "You wouldn't shoot an unarmed man!"

"Depends on how bad he needs shootin'. Get up and move. We're going to have that showdown."

The sheriff said judiciously, "You'd better come, Dave." The sheriff began to get up to show his own willingness.

Then Dave got up slowly by pushing the table to make more room for his belly. The table squeaked a little on the splintery floor. "What are you fixin' to do there?"

"Tell my side of the story and let you tell yourn."

"That is fair, Dave. Yes, fair and square," said the sheriff, helpfully.

THE sheriff walked out first. Dave followed. They single-filed across to the back of the general store, tramped up the four wooden steps to the loading platform.

"March right along in," said Red.

The sheriff opened the door, pushed it wide. He had a look as if this was his show. "Good evenin', gentlemen." The poker players turned their heads and blinked a little. "The Clark boy and Dave has come over here to talk about the shootin' today so folks can know what to think." He was making it sound as if he brought them. "Come along in, Dave. Come in, Clark."

Dave's black eyes had a startled searching quickness as if looking for friends, but his thick mouth smiled as if everybody was his friend. He pushed up his hat and stroked his thick shiny mustache, looked longest at Bill Clayton; and Bill's eyes covered with a kind of sullen glaze, were questioning and not at ease.

Red gave the door a swing that slammed it hard.

Five men, all middle aged or more, were playing poker at a round table over which a blanket had been thrown. This was a kind of store room, with coils of rope and bins of nails and shelves of canned goods. There were axle grease and single trees, and a clutter of hardware. A lamp swung from a rafter directly above the table. The smell of coal oil was strong.

"Red, what is all this?" The Judge put down his poker hand, laid chips on it.

Dave spoke up, as though there was no unpleasantness at all. "Just a little honest difference of opinion about—"

"You keep still," Red told him. "I'll talk first." Out went a hand, pointing, almost touched Dave. "He is sayin' on the sly that Mr. Clayton was shot accidental today in that gunfight. He is a liar! I think he knowed what them fellers was waitin' for. And I brought him here for you all to hear me tell him so!"

"That is mighty reckless language!" said the Judge. "Why, we all know

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Dave." He moved his bald head, earnestly reproving Red. However, two or three of the older poker players eyed Red with a kind of admiration, almost with agreement. "Dave," said the Judge, "has been in this country a long long time and—"

The Judge didn't seem able to go on. He couldn't quite say that Dave was highly thought of, and he couldn't say that some people talked about him pretty harshly. So he wiped his bald head and looked uncomfortable.

"He says," Red explained, "that Mr. Clayton ain't a good judge of what happened because he was shot in the back and couldn't see. He says Miss Clayton was in the store so that she ain't an eyewitness. He says that me and the men started shootin'—me first!—and wild bullets hit Mr. Clayton. And he has made Bill Clayton here—" Red's arm went out as straight as if he held a gun at young Clayton's head—"think maybe I orta be arrested as if 'twas *my* shots that went wild—which some dead men can testify they didn't! This Dave figgers, I reckon, that nobody but him seen the fight start, so he can tell it his way. I seen it start, too, and I'm tellin' it my way. And there was a fellow named Jim Brady that seen it start—"

"*Who?*" The word jumped out of Bill Clayton's mouth, loud and sharp. He looked quickly at Dave, and Dave looked a little as if he had been poked in the belly.

"He wasn't in town!" said Dave, but there was somehow a faint question mark tied to the words.

"He told me his name was Brady, anyhow."

Bill Clayton's sullen face looked as if he were ready to jump nervously at any sudden sound, and Dave sidled to a shelf and rested as if it helped a little to have something to lean on.

Red puckered up his forhead. "And that man that rode away—the Brady feller said he was Mell Barber!"

The five poker players widened their eyes, nodded at one another.

"Son," said the Judge, "this Barber has the name of being the worst man in the Kilco bunch, and there is a story that he and Kilco have had a falling out over—"

"Not much of a bad man!" said Red, hotly. "He lost his boot heel and acted crippled. Ran—when there was other men's loaded guns on the ground for him to pick up and use!"

Dave spoke up, loud. He looked excited and earnest. "If that was Mell Barber, then I sure made a mistake about thinkin' the boy here—and we have all got to get up a big reward for him, dead or alive! Yes sir!"

One of the old poker players said, "'Cordin' to what is said, there is already a little reward for him."

"We'll make a big 'un!" said Dave. "I'll give five hundred dollars toward it myself!"

"I'll make a thousand of it!" said Bill Clayton, standing up and looking angry.

Red looked at Dave with a glitter in his bright eyes. "How come? One minute you are makin' Bill here think I orta be arrested, and the next minute you are posterin' a reward for the only one of them fellers I didn't shoot!"

Dave looked sadly at Red. He took out a handkerchief and wiped his face.

"It does look a little like I made a mistake," he admitted with guttural humbleness. "So I will tell just how it was. Them men come into my place and had a drink. Then they went outside and stood in front. I went to the door and wondered about them.

"When this boy here rode up, he acted and they acted like they had met before and wasn't friends. And I just figgered right there and then they knowed this boy and was layin' for 'im.

"The shootin' started sudden. I jumped back and shut the door of my place, and I figgered that the shootin' was all between them. When I learnt

that Sam had been hit, I figgered it was by wild bullets. So I just figgered—"

Red cut in with, "You're lyin' now! You saw how it started 'cause you been sayin' Mr. Clayton had his back turned and that the girl wasn't even outdoors!"

"No, no," said Dave, sad and humble and sounding honest. "I had just seen Sam come out when the shootin' started. I didn't know who started it. I thought sure it was between you and them men. But I must've made a mistake. I am glad that things have been brought out in the open."

Dave even stuck out a hand to Red, but Red hooked his thumbs in his belt, and told him, "I got doubts, but maybe you are tellin' the truth. Only you got no business havin' opinions when you can't see straight!"

Dave looked sorrowful that he was so misjudged, but he also looked a little relieved when Red added, "Me, I'm goin' up to the Judge's place and go to bed. I'm ridin' first thing in the mornin'."

He opened the door, tramped out.

Men looked at one another, but mostly they looked at the Judge and some grinned. One said, "Whew-ee!" The old storekeeper scratched his nose, murmuring, "If ever there was a full-growed wildcat in pants!"

"Dave," said another, "it has been a long time since I heard you talk so humble."

Dave twisted his black mustache, showed a sickly grin. "Which of you would have sassed him back?"

"You gentlemen," said the Judge, smiling, "may make raucous sounds of scoffing, but the fact is that Red is really chicken-hearted in many ways."

The card players did make raucous sounds, but the Judge bobbed his head affirmingly. Then he took the chips off his cards. "All this delay and I've got a pat hand. Any of you boys want to sit in. How about you, Sheriff?"

"I got some business," said Dave.

Bill Clayton said, "I'll go over to the hotel and see how the old man feels."

The sheriff took off his hat and put it back on. "I'll just take a hand or two." He went around to sit on the keg where Bill had been.

DAVE GRIDGER and Bill Clayton went out together, not saying goodnight as they left the room. Outside, Bill stumbled on the platform steps, unsteadily.

They walked off together in the shadows behind the buildings.

Bill stopped and hushed his voice to an uneasy whisper. "He said *Brady* was in town!"

Dave peered into the shadows, answered cautiously. "Maybe he was."

"Layin' for Mell?"

"Or to see Kate," Dave suggested, staring suspiciously at one shadow after another. "Why haven't you ever told your old man about him and her?"

"She would tell about me if I did. You know what the old man would do to *me!*"

"He won't do nothin' to you ever again, Bill," Dave said low and encouragingly. "He ain't goin' to get well." Dave puffed. "But we got ourselves in a mess. Hush!" Dave listened as if about ready to jump. He rubbed his forehead with his palm and kept turning his thick neck, uneasily. Then, "How the hell was anybody to know that a red-headed devil who is bullet proof would come ridin' in! But we can't talk here. Too many shadders. 'Magine him bein' under a table! You heard him say he thought I knew what they were waitin' for. He is just too damn smart. But we can't talk here."

They walked on across to the blacksmith shop and went under the cottonwood. "We better talk low, even here," said Dave.

Bill sat down and chewed a cigar. Dave grunted a little in getting down with his back against the tree. "You

know, Bill," he said, "I got mixed up in this out of liking for you."

"You," Bill growled, "got me mixed up in all this because you know my old man hates the sight and smell of you."

"You needed money, Bill."

"And you've made some, too. Hope to make more. And you made things worse by sayin' the old man was shot accidental thataway."

"Now Bill, I had to try to take the blame off Mell. I was standin' right there ready to yell, 'They've killed Sam Clayton!' And that would have been all right if they could have hit their horses and rode out of town. Nobody would have knowed who they were. But I was afraid somebody would recognize them when they was laid out on the floor. I had to take the blame off Mell as well as I could. There is some, Bill, that know how well you know Mell Barber. And that fellow that calls himself Brady is one of 'em!"

"You are in this as deep as me!" said Bill sullenly.

"Yes. Sure. I am. And it will all come out all right."

"If the old man don't die and ever finds out—"

"Don't worry, Bill. That horse doctor don't know nothin'. And he is plenty bad hurt."

"Something is goin' to have to be done about that Red. We ought to send out word to Frank Knox," Bill suggested.

"Frank ain't the man to tackle that hombre."

Bill threw away his cigar. "You act scairt of him."

Dave said solemnly, "I'm not exactly what you call scairt, but he is such a crazy damn fool—why, look how he hauled me and the sheriff over there to the store and had a showdown that I nearly lost!"

"Then why don't you send word out to Frank Knox?"

"I'm thinkin'. I'm goin' to send word. But I've got to tell Knox to be careful."

"There's lots of boulders and trees!"

Dave nodded. "That is so. But it won't do to have this Red shot from behind a rock, Bill. There are some folks that would be likely to suspect me. And maybe you. Your old man, if he don't die, would wonder a lot. He don't like me, Bill. So we can't have no mystery about who kills this Red. It has got to be open and above board—if we can work it that way. So I've got to set and think."

RED jogged out of town at sunrise with the Judge's letter to Frank Knox in his pocket. The morning air was fresh and clear; and he looked about at the unfamiliar landscape with just about as much interest as an Eastern man would have looked at the streets of a city where he was a stranger.

He was riding north toward the wooded hogbacks that came down from the mountains. He talked to the horse and whistled a little, sang some; but he couldn't sing very well and nearly everybody who ever heard him said so.

As soon as he was out of town Red noticed the tracks of a horse that had galloped that way through the night. That was not anything to wonder about, for often men rode out of town at a lope; but after some miles, when he saw that the horse had been forced on at a gallop, Red said, "Damn fool," and let it go at that.

In about two hours he reached a windmill and old small 'dobe called Manning Springs after the old man who for years had been there. He stopped to let his horse drink, said, "Lo, dad," to the old man who told him that the springs and mill belonged to the Clayton outfit. Manning was a sociable old fellow with broken teeth and scrubby beard. He looked at Red's guns, looked at the thoroughbred black, solemnly whittled a chew from a hard black plug.

"Why you look at me thataway, dad?"

The old fellow scratched up under his battered hat, showed the broken teeth. "I'm an old man. One reason I've growed old is because I always keep my mouth shut."

"You've guessed wrong, dad. I'm not on the dodge. I'm ridin' out to boss the Lazy Z."

The old man closed one eye, studied, then chewed a while as solemnly as a cow chews her cud. He spit, opened the eye, rubbed his chin. "I hear tell they is some good money to be made in packin' snowballs to hell."

"What's so wrong out to the Lazy Z?"

"Nuthin'. Oh nuthin' a-tall. Purty ranch. Oh, you bet!" He grinned knowingly and jerked his head forward. "I understand that folks enjoy the best health when they keep their mouths shet. Luck, son." He waved an arm in a wide sweep and had a friendly look, but Red knew that he had been given a warning.

The road parted three ways at the Springs. Red kept to the north, taking the least traveled road that began to wind over rolling hills that some miles farther on grew into small mountains.

He saw that the galloping horse had also taken this road.

Red pulled up and got off, examining tracks. Three of the shoes were worn; the right rear was new, at least newer, with calks that left a sharp imprint. He was not a sign reader like some he knew; but he was on to the *a b c's* of trailing; and he could tell by the drag of lizards' tails and dab of quail tracks in the dust that crossed the hoof mark just about how long ago that horse had traveled this way. This horse, he judged, had come along since midnight, and in a hurry.

Red jogged on, thinking it over, suspiciously. This was the road to the Lazy Z, no doubt also the road to other small ranches and nesters' places; but if these tracks turned in to the Lazy Z ranch house they would mean something. Mean that somebody had come out from town with some kind of news.

A mile or farther along the road he met a young Mexican coming at a walk, with reins loose. It was a tired horse with dried sweat on the flanks.

Red said in Spanish, "Good day, señor."

The young Mexican peered through slitted eyes and mumbled, but touched his hat and pulled a little to one side to give Red the road. Red guessed that perhaps Mexicans and gringoes didn't get on well up here in this Nelplaid country.

He went on about fifty feet before his eyes looked into the dust ahead of him. Then Red wheeled his horse with sweep of reins, touch of spur, and in a few bounds he reined up alongside the frightened Mexican boy.

"Señor," said Red politely, "one question, please." It was ever so much easier to be polite in Spanish. "The Lazy Z ranch, it is not far?"

"It is not far, señor."

"Do you by chance come from there this morning?"

"Yes, señor."

"And to reach the ranch, you rode fast last night?"

"But señor!"

"And what message did you take, if you please?"

"Message, señor?"

Red snapped in English, not politely, "You got ears! Unfold 'em!"

The young Mexican wrinkled his face in uncomfortable puzzlement. "But how could you know, señor?"

"Never you mind. I want to know who sent you. Come on, talk!"

"The Señor Gridger," said the Mexican uneasily.

"What'd he tell you to say?"

"It was a letter, señor."

"Who for?"

"Señor Knox."

Red grinned, went back to Spanish. "You have a charming face and a pleas-

ant voice, my friend. Please be agreeable enough to tell me what questions this Señor Knox asked you about a fellow by the name of Red Clark!"

"Who is yourself, señor!" said the Mexican boy, bowing.

"If you knew me, why were you so unfriendly just now when I spoke to you in passing?"

"Ah, but I was not unfriendly, señor. I was afraid. You are—" He stopped, embarrassed, not wanting to accuse Red of being a desperado who might shoot with no reason at all.

"A hardworkin' honest cowboy—that's me! What all did this Knox want to know about me?"

He heard that Knox had wanted to know what he looked like, where he was from, had he really stood up to four men and downed three; and had Mell Barber been shot, as Dave Gridger seemed to think; and was it true that the man called Jim Brady had been in town?

"Peace go with you, señor," said Red, lifting his hat, very politely.

The Mexican's horse, returning from the ranch, had of course made the same shoe-tracks in the dust as in going.

AN hour later Red sat in the saddle and looked about, not pleased. He was unused to mountain ranches. Pine trees were in the way, although they had long ago been cut down near the house and corral. The ranch house was of mud and logs with a wide door. The sheds and corrals were old, in need of repair.

He rode up to the house and halloed.

A sour man with a strip of buckskin for a suspender over his gray undershirt shuffled out of the dimness. He had a long straggling mustache and his cheeks were covered with gray fuzz as if once in a while he shaved. A burned corn cob pipe drooped from his mouth. His hands were white and soft and that meant he was cook.

He looked Red over with watery eyes, ran a hand through his tangled hair.

"Air you that feller?" he questioned.

"What feller, pop?"

"Knox said this mornin' that he had sent the Judge word that he was quittin' and the Judge was sendin' out a new boss."

"I'm him."

Cook snorted. "Not in my end of the house you ain't."

"That goes if you're a good cook. You go if you ain't!"

Cook looked at the guns, looked at Red's face, gazed at the fine black horse. "He is a-wearin' two guns and a-wearin' 'em low down, and he is a-packin' a rifle! I bet old Jesse James hisself would turn pale as a sick woman if he was to see you!"

"I bet you'd better be one mighty fine cook if you don't want to have to keep your mouth shut a little. If you are, you can say what you damn please!"

Cook waggled the pipe between his teeth, hitched up his lone gallus, stared without batting an eye and spoke: "We got enough fool kids around here. How long do you think *you* are stayin'?"

"Depends, pop. You pull a steak out of the skillet. I'm goin' to water and feed my horse. When I come back, if it's a good steak, maybe I'll let you look at a bottle I brung along."

The cook grinned, pulled at a mustache end. "You don't look so much a damn fool as I first thought."

The big room had a beaten earth floor, a half dozen bunks, some stools, a bench or two, and a table. At one end was the kitchen, with no partition. The stove was an old cast iron contraption and its waggling legs were supported by up-ended chunks of logs. The room was in the untidy half-hearted cleanness of careless men living together, strong with the smell of sweat and tobacco.

The cook put a hot brown thick steak on the table, with pickles, cold biscuits, warmed over coffee, and Red brought out the bottle of whisky. They had a drink, a big one. Red cut into the steak. "I guess you've got a right to be onery"

he acknowledged, heaping sugar into his coffee. "This is good grub."

A half hour later the bottle was nearly empty, the cook full. He was talking to Red as to a long lost brother, called Red, "Son," and told him not to stay. He said that it was all right for the other boys to stay because they were just kids and didn't do anything but ride around. It was going to be bad for Red if he tried to boss the ranch.

"How so, hm?"

"Rustlers own this country."

"They friends of yourn, pop?"

Cook grinned foolishly. "They ain't en'mies. An' they was friends of Al's."

"Who is Al?"

"Alvord. I told him he was a damn fool. Anyhow, any man is that's been married twicet!"

"What about him, pop?"

"Cantankerous ol' coyote, Al was. And mean."

"How it come you got on with him so long?"

"I'd make 'im so mad he wouldn't talk for days. Not open his mouth. You ain't no idee how peaceable that is 'less you been married!"

"I'm listenin', pop."

Cook up-ended the bottle. "I told Al he was a damn fool. He throwed in with rustlers and worse. Al liked me. I half way liked him. So we got on. Al had it in for old Sam Clayton. And fellers—you'd be surprised what fellers—helped 'emselves to Clayton cows. And sometimes Al—no harm in sayin' so now because pore ol' Al he is dead—he rode with Kilco's bunch. Oh, he was a no good old wolf!" Cook smacked the table with bottom of the bottle. "But I liked 'im."

Cook drained the last drop from the bottle, teetered woozily on his stool, then sank forward drowsily, face down on his arms. In a few minutes he was dead to the world.

Red rolled a cigarette, lighted it, scratched behind an ear, looked at the cook. "So I've come to be boss of a rustler's ranch?"

A few minutes later he heaved the cook up, carried him to a bunk, rolled him into it, gave the pillow a twist to make the cook's head more comfortable.

ALONG late in the afternoon two boys rode in.

Red introduced himself and they all looked one another over. Red sized them up as good kids, scarcely half way through their teens. Bobby's nose was up-turned a little as if sniffing impudently and he had a wide mouth, filled with grins. Pete was of stronger stuff, had more thoughtful eyes, more of a resolute look.

They examined Red with shy stares, their thoughts very close to the surface of their brown faces: Red didn't look much older than they, and grinned and talked as if not much older.

A little later Frank Knox came. A slim man with straight black hair and straight black brows that joined when he scowled. He scowled a little at Red, but said:

"I'm glad you come. I told the Judge I had more'n I could do, me with my own ranch just up the valley."

He was making his throaty voice as pleasant as he could, but all the while his black eyes stared coldly at Red, sizing him up. Knox had something of the Indian look about him, as if he could hide his feelings.

Red didn't say much of anything.

Knox fished around with, "How's things in town?"

"All right, I reckon."

"Any excitement a-tall?"

"I went to bed early and got up in the dark."

"There is usually some little shootin' in Nelplaid," said Knox, smoothing down the back of his hair.

"Oh, there was some guns goin' off a little. But at times like that, strangers

orta keep their noses under cover. It's safer," said Red, mild and innocent.

Knox's face had a funny look. He didn't want to admit that he had got word out from town, and so have reason to question Red directly. And it was hard for him to believe that this lanky young fellow had made any such gun-fight as Dave Gridger wrote about; harder to believe that he would keep his mouth shut if he had made it.

Knox reread the Judge's letter that Red had brought out, and smiled a little.

"The Judge asks me to give you all the help I can, and I sure will."

"That there is fine," said Red.

Knox told him, "There used to be a lot of rustlers up here, but we cleaned 'em out. Us little cowmen we all stick together."

"That," Red agreed, "is mighty fine."

Knox looked thoughtful and explained, "It is nesters and such who are worst. There is one over yonder across the valley who makes his brag, or used to, that he kept fat on Lazy Z beef."

Red looked interested, not speaking.

"He's growed sorta lean since I been in charge," said Knox.

"I bet you explained how it was bad for a feller's health to eat Lazy Z beef, hm."

"You are right. 'Twas him as run off the two bosses the Judge sent out before I took charge. But I made him tuck his tail between his legs and go back up in the hills where he belongs. Yet he must have heard I was fixin' to quit."

"Um?" Red was mild and interested.

"Just this afternoon," said Knox, "I met a feller who said Old Blackman had killed another cow. I was meanin' to ride over in the mornin' and give him hell. But since you come, I think I'll light out for my ranch tonight. You are the new boss now. You can use your own judgment about lettin' Blackman eat Lazy Z beef." Knox went on from behind a crooked smile, "Only if he ain't set on, he'll strut around and say how scairt you are of him. He is a windy old shypoke and bellers loud. I'm just tellin' you and you can do as you please. He knows I'm quittin' because he knows if I wasn't I'd stick my spurs in his neck."

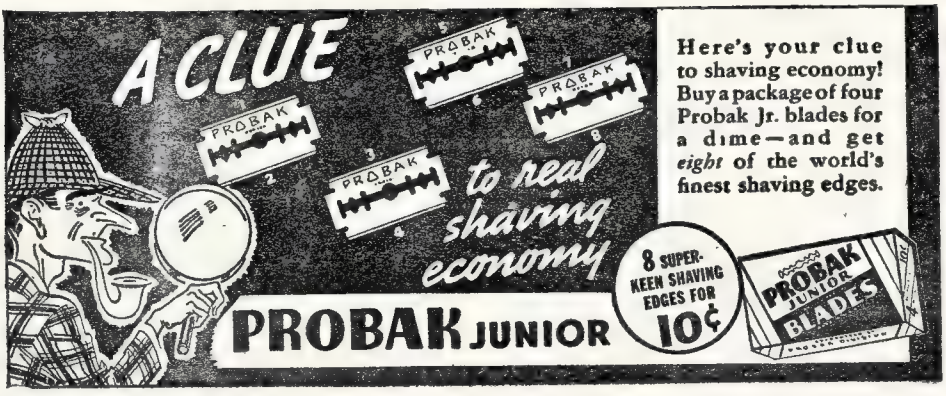
"Some nesters," Red admitted, "are like that."

Knox would not stay to supper. He was in a hurry to get to his ranch and give it a little care because, he said, he had been putting in all of his time keeping the Lazy Z straight. "But any time you want to know something, or need help, just you come over and ask me."

"Sure," said Red.

Knox rode off through the twilight and Red sat on a stump, smoked a cigarette. His eyes were puzzled and wary.

(to be continued)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Out shot Falconer's hard right fist.

TRUST A PATHAN?

A novelette by PERRY ADAMS

FUSSY FITZMAURICE had the jitters. He had been having them all winter, of course, as his staff could testify, but right now the jitters were extra-special and on the whole, far from unwarranted.

Poked off out here, high in tribal hills, his command fog-bound and with his quarry in chains, the general was like a man told to find a pot of gold at the bottom of a well.

He had dropped down into the well and found the gold, to realize that his troubles had only begun. He had still to find a way of climbing out with his prize.

In this case the captured Gool Mohammed was the prize, but Kohat was eighty miles away.

It was this firebrand chief of the Jowakis, a clan of the Adam Khel Afridis, whom Fitzmaurice's column had pursued through the winter. Gool had sworn that neither he nor his people had had any part in the murder of eleven white men directing highway construction near Kohat the previous summer. But the ever-efficient C.I.D. soon proved him a liar, whereupon it became mandatory that the Raj take Gool alive, if possible, and bring him in for trial.

The weather had been filthy. It snowed practically forever; and the expedition, under continual long-range sniping, left a trail of its own frozen blood that crossed and recrossed itself from Khyber Pass down to the land of the Waziris.

Meanwhile the Government, chafing at the cost in men and money and the inordinate delay, commenced to question Fitzmaurice's efficiency and contemplated supplanting him with another field officer.

That was how things stood when, on the last day of April, the spring thaw set in. Suddenly the whole crazyquilt country was blanketed under a fog as softly thick and impenetrable as gray wool. Even Gool's ghostlike snipers gave up. The air force, eyes of the slow moving ground column, flew out as usual; but with visibility zero, they flew home again to Risalpur and stayed there.

For a week, then, Fitzmaurice and his not-so-merry men sat in slush, waiting for the mists to lift. And now that the sniping had ceased and there was no R.A.F. to report tribal movements, where Gool was, only Gool and Allah knew.

What followed was, you'll admit, pretty much of an anti-climax. A detail of the King's Liverpools—one of several long-suffering groups ordered to stumble about the *khuds* on what was humorously labeled defensive patrol duty—this particular party walked smack into Gool and a dozen of his men.

Both sides were too amazed for instantaneous, split-second action. Gool's crowd were seated, munching *chuppattis,* and in the small fragment of time it took them to recover and reach for their rifles, the Liverpools put the blast on them, killing eight. The rest were away like wraiths—except Gool himself. The old fellow, no longer very spry, was swarmed under and captured unharmed. And so what Fitzmaurice had been unable to do through six months of campaigning, blind chance brought about in a few seconds of unplanned effort.

THE general rushed off an elated wireless to Delhi, via Peshawar, and that night all India knew that Gool Mohammed would be brought in for a trial which could have only one end: barring accidents, Gool would hang.

Accidents. It seemed unlikely that Gool's henchmen would allow him to languish in British hands without an attempt at rescue.

"Fog or no fog, we've got to start moving down country at once," Fitzmaurice told his staff.

They talked him out of it. "That would be courting disaster," they said. "It would be too easy for the Jowakis to ambush us in column of route."

"God knows what will happen if we wait here for the fog to break," the general sighed. Yet he decided it was the lesser evil. There was still another factor to increase his nervousness.

Two companies of the Pathan Regiment, a unit of the column, were recruited from this very Jowaki clan. Fussy Fitzmaurice had commanded that outfit until his promotion to brigadier three years before.

How would the enrolled Jowakis react to the capture of their chief? The general's thoughts turned to Ali Khan, now a jemadar of the regiment, but also head of a family long powerful in tribal politics. Never, in his years as colonel of Pathans, had the general trusted this man. But then, intensely suspicious by nature, Fitzmaurice had never quite trusted anyone, not even his British officers.

The general reasoned: "Ali Khan might try to help Gool escape. Ali's like all these fellows—just a murderous savage at heart, with not the slightest sense of loyalty to the Raj." The staff had no more than left him when he sent for Ralph Falconer, his second in command in regimental days, who had succeeded him as colonel and for whom he had no love.

The brigadier, a slight, still-faced little man with darting gray eyes and a twitchy gray mustache that somehow gave him the air of an over-ambitious Puss-in-Boots, thought Falconer too soft, too easy going. But fundamentally, the general's resentment sprang from the knowledge that Falconer had always been universally liked in the regiment, while he knew himself to have been heartily detested.

It was about five p.m.—some four hours after Gool's capture—when Fitzmaurice, watching from the door of his tent, identified Falconer's outline as it loomed from the mist. The colonel was one of those big, fair, loose-jointed men, calm and rather slow of movement, whom you knew instinctively you could tie to; searching his rawboned hawk face you found great honesty of purpose, kindliness, and no weakness. Nor was it the face of one given to hair splitting, to devious subtleties, to small-souled backbiting. With Falconer, everyone always knew where he stood.

Nervously impatient, the general nodded shortly and waved to a chair opposite his own. When he spoke his voice was jerky, with a trace of condescension.

"Well, what with this damnable fog, I've decided to hold the camp. Seems safest, though a lot of things can happen."

"An attack is possible," Ralph Falconer agreed.

"That, naturally," Fitzmaurice snapped. "Yet even granting there would be endless confusion, I feel any attempt to rescue Gool would fail, were it not for the possible cooperation with their kinsmen by your Jowakis—Ali Khan in particular."

The colonel stiffened. "I think you alarm yourself needlessly, sir. Not a man of them would raise a finger unless Ali insisted—and why should he want to help his greatest political enemy? Why, with Gool removed, Ali will be resigning his commission to become chief of the Jowakis himself."

The general shot a glance at him and his mustache commenced twitching—a sure sign of anger.

"Oh, don't be naïve," he snorted. "You know Ali'll never have the faintest chance of becoming chief so long as he continues to be opposed by the *mullahs*. Those fanatical priests are death on anyone who's been in our service. They think a clansman who's rubbed shoulders with Unbelievers is lost to Islam—that he's made a contract with the devil."

"You overlook Gool's unpopularity. Although Ali's been with us for years, he has an immense tribal following."

"That doesn't offset *mullah* antagonism—and Ali knows it, else he'd have quit us long ago to rally his supporters and take a fling at Gool."

"But—"

"Don't you see how Ali can make capital out of the present situation? It's plain to all that if we get Gool to Delhi, he's headed for the worst disgrace that can overtake a Pathan—a hanging by Christians. Defilement of a devout Moslem—why, the *mullahs* will scream that from every watch tower in the land; any dislike of Gool will momentarily be swamped under a tidal wave of religious fervor. And Ali? Suppose he were to help engineer Gool's escape—be the inside man? That would seem proof positive to the *mullahs* that Ali put religion above his own ambitions, and would go far toward altering their attitude."

"But if Gool got away, what good—"

"Ali knows that if Gool escapes, we're bound to resume the chase until he's killed or recaptured"

FALCONER shook his head. "Pretty far-fetched, if you ask me."

"I imagined you'd think so," the brigadier said sarcastically.

The colonel went on imperturbably, "Besides, do you believe for a second that Ali would risk his whole future and our good will on such a forlorn hope—trying to deliver a man so closely guarded? Scarcely!"

"Naturally Ali would believe he could help turn the trick without his part being discovered," Fitzmaurice said coldly. "It all amounts to this. If anything *should* happen to Gool before we get him back to railhead at Kohat—if there's the faintest suggestion of collusion from the inside—I'll know where to

look for at least one culprit, and I'll hold you directly responsible."

None knew better than the general how disastrous to himself it would be were the prisoner to escape; coming on top of these months of costly delay it might spell demotion, even the end of his career.

He hoped fervently that nothing of the sort would happen. If it did, the sole compensation, if such it could be called, would be to see Falconer humbled as well. It would be a source of smug gratification to Fitzmaurice's small soul to bring down the man whom through twenty-five years he had come to hate with steadily mounting, consuming jealousy.

Ralph Falconer stood up with quiet violence. "You imply, then, that I should make Ali Khan a virtual prisoner to protect myself?"

"Why not?" Fitzmaurice's next words revealed the vast gulf between the two men; explained, too, why Falconer was liked and—by inference—why the general wasn't.

"You've always shown a silly, childlike faith in these worthless rascals," he said. "For that they give lip service and salaams, but behind your back they sneer at you for your gullibility."

Falconer said stiffly: "Simply because some Pathans are unreliable is no reason to condemn all of them. When I find one I feel I can trust, I'm with him all the way. I trust Ali Khan. He—why, I'd stake my commission against his integrity!"

"Would you?" Fitzmaurice's eyes gleamed maliciously. "That may be precisely what you'll be doing."

II. KNIVES OF THE KHYBER

WITH the coming of night the fog was thicker than ever. Toward eleven, after a final inspection of his own lines, Ralph Falconer was just settling in his bedroll on the floor of his tent when he heard an urgent Pushtu voice.

"Sahib! Have I permission to enter?" The speaker was Ali Khan.

"Come in, Jemadar sahib." The colonel sat up and relighted his still smoking hurricane lamp as the Jowaki parted the tent flaps and entered.

Ali was tall, even for a Pathan. His body was lean, but with a fine sweep of shoulder characteristic of Afridis. Olive features were deeply chiseled, aquiline—the nose in profile distinctly Semitic—and he was clean shaven save for a neat mustache above a wide, thin-lipped mouth and jutting chin. It was a proud face, determined always, and in repose austere.

Ali saluted; and, commanding black eyes snapping with excitement, commenced speaking at once.

"Sahib, word has just been brought me that Gool Mohammed's men are about to attempt a rescue!"

The colonel stared at him. "Tonight?"

Ali nodded.

Falconer began pulling on his breeches. "How did you hear this?"

"Through a cousin of mine, headman of a village two valleys from here. Gool's supporters have made the place their headquarters since the fog came. The three who escaped our patrol went there hotfoot with news of Gool's capture."

"What is planned—a general attack by the whole *lashkar?*"

"*Nahin.* Rather, a picked few will try to slip through our pickets. If they reach Gool and get him clear, the others will divert pursuit."

"How soon are they coming—did your cousin know?"

"Yes! At once, he said. The *mullahs* were choosing the rescue party even as he slipped away."

Now fully dressed, Falconer stuck his head from the tent. The night was made to order for such an attempt: Darkness added to the enveloping mist had cut visibility to absolutely nothing.

"Come," he said urgently, "I want you to repeat this to the general."

Ali did not move.

The colonel frowned slightly. "You must lay aside any old differences, my friend. I have special reasons for wanting you to tell the general yourself."

"Huzoor, you—I do not wish to go." Ali's eyes were on the ground. "I cannot forget it was Fitzmaurice sahib who unjustly held back my promotion. Aye, again and again he did so! Men laughed at me. When Fitzmaurice sahib at last left the regiment, I swore that should our paths cross again, I would beat his face with my shoe*. Your honor's kindness in promoting me does not affect that vow, made within the hearing of others. Do not ask me to go before him now, huzoor, for I am in honor bound to carry out the vow."

Ali's hot words were spoken as to a friend he trusted rather than to his commanding officer. Such sentiments uttered by an Englishman would have been not only ridiculous and theatrical, but indicative of gross insubordination. Coming from a Pathan—and from Ali Khan in particular—they were none of these things. Ralph Falconer's great hold over his men lay, partially, in knowing when to concede a point. He did so now, with a growing awareness of the passage of priceless time.

"Very well," he agreed hurriedly. "Go find the subahdar major and tell him to have the regiment stand to without noise. I'll be back directly."

"Allah bless your understanding heart," Ali sighed. He followed the colonel from the tent, saluted and vanished.

Using a flashlight sparingly, Falconer groped a precarious way toward staff lines. Pitched on rising ground rather than in the valley itself, the camp had become honeycombed with ravines—sluices for the melting snow and ice from the heights above. Here the colonel leaped a small *nullah*, here, across a wider one, he felt his way across a flimsy bridge of packing cases. All about him was the lisp and gurgle of running water—a kind of alto accompaniment to the deeper roar of the swollen river below.

To reach the general's tent, Falconer had to pass through the lines to the King's Liverpools, and, close to the tent which housed Gool Mohammed, he was challenged. Nearer he made out a cordon of sentries and guard-prowlers, Liverpools to a man and all huddled deep in their British warms.

Directly to the rear of the tent they watched over stretched a particularly wide *nullah*, waist deep in churning ice water, a-rush to its turbulent meeting with the invisible river. Staff lines lay immediately across this ravine. The colonel set foot gingerly on the rickety wooden span which bridged it.

"Better watch your step, sir," a sentry warned. "Water's cuttin' away at our trick bridge just like it's doin' t' the pegs o' the guard tent. Neither ain't too secure."

RALPH FALCONER'S flash stabbed the fog as he briefly inspected the bridge; then he swung the light around to the rear of the tent. So deeply had the water cut into the bank that the tent-guys disappeared under water. Not only was it impossible to guard this side—the pegs might let go any instant.

"Bad place to keep a valuable prisoner," Falconer remarked, amazed that Gool had not been shifted to a better spot.

The sentry explained that. "They're fixin' up another tent somewheres, sir. Meanwhile, we got eight of our chaps inside wiv the chief—an' 'e's in chains—so we don't figure nothin' much can 'appen."

It might do, the colonel thought, pro-

*In Moslem eyes, one of the most deadly of insults.

vided the shift were soon made. For all that, the move should have been made earlier. But this was not his unit, so without further talk he stepped on the bridge. His flashlight picked up boards stenciled *Tickler's Jam—Plum* and *Tickler's Jam—Apple.*

Once across, the general's sentry challenged him and a moment later a yawning staff captain emerged from Fitzmaurice's tent.

"Lovely night for a call," was the staff officer's greeting. He lowered his voice. "He's edgy as a razor, sir. Don't go in unless you have to."

"I do have to." Ralph Falconer passed inside, to find the general sitting up in bed, frowning over a sea of papers.

It was no time to stand on ceremony, so ignoring Fitzmaurice's cold stare, the colonel quickly repeated Ali's story.

Fitzmaurice listened impatiently. "Why bother me with a thing like this?" he snapped. "Don't you see, man? Ali's simply posing. He wants us to think he's a devilish fine fellow, overflowing with loyalty. His tale's so much poppycock. This is the one night nothing will happen."

The colonel mastered rising anger. "My regiment is already standing to, sir. I know you want to take every precaution. Why not play safe—have the rest of the camp roused without delay?"

Fitzmaurice considered, mustache twitching, and a small alarm clock on a camp stool near his bed thunderously ticked off the seconds.

He said at last, as though time meant nothing, "Did you see the man supposed to have brought in the news?"

"See him? No. With minutes so precious—"

"H'm. Be sure Ali counted on your blind faith, too. I dont' think any such person ever came into camp." The mustache twitched more furiously than ever.

Falconer resisted an ancient impulse to tear it out by the roots.

"In the name of God, sir—"

The general ignored him. "We'll take a look at this obliging visitor—if he exists. Orderly!"

The orderly appeared.

"This'll take time, sir," the colonel pleaded. "Won't you—"

"Orderly, go to—"

The orderly, an obedient wooden automaton, all at once became human. He moved, turning to peer from the tent.

"Lissen, sir. *Lissen!*"

Over the sound of rushing water they heard shots, then a swelling tide of men's voices—and as they ran from the tent a single lantern was swinging crazily across the *nullah.* Through the thick blackness a whistle shrilled.

The general cried out, "Damn it, someone bring me my boots and breeches!"

And Ralph Falconer, poised there with the wet night air clammy on his face, had a sudden feeling amounting to conviction that the moving finger had written—that time had beaten them.

III. PICKED MEN

IN various stages of undress, staff officers, others, were all about him now. More and more flashlights and hurricane lamps were showing, and in the yellow murk Falconer could just discern the dull glint of muddy water that rushed by at his feet.

Then they were all crowding across the frail affair that served as bridge, and a young sergeant of Liverpools half staggered from the guard tent muttering dazedly, "Gawd. Oh, my Gawd—wot they done ter Bill—to 'em *all.*"

He gazed foolishly about the growing ring of white faces. They pushed him aside and he stood, arms limp, fixed bayonet dragging in the mud, repeating, "Bill—old Bill," over and over.

From somewhere beyond the range of light a man was protesting, trying to explain the inexplicable:

"But I tells yer, we *wuz* orl at our posts, an' we never 'eard a thing. An' when we *did* 'ear, an' piled inside—"

Ralph Falconer identified the voice of the sentry who so recently had assured him that nothing much could happen.

They were in the tent now—Fitzmaurice in a British warm—they'd overlooked his breeches—bare, white, skinny knees like a picked chicken's.

In grotesque attitudes, the still warm bodies of dead Liverpools were heaped about the floor. One, kneeling, hands sprawled out behind, palms up, like a seal's flippers, pressed a cheek to the mud as if listening.

But he was done with hearing, for from ear to ear he wore the gory, tell-tale ruff left by tribal knife. Tent walls were red splotched as by the wavering brush of a drunken painter; and under the rear canvas a half-dozen grooves channeled down through the mud into the waters of the *nullah,* for all the world as if giant reptiles had stealthily slithered up and in that way, and that way gone.

And Gool Mohammed was gone with them—chains and all. In the seconds Ralph Falconer stared down into outer darkness, he could see what must have transpired in that strange delivery. He could see the desperate little band of Gool's people, muslin robes high kilted, yet wet and muddied for all that, creeping between two pickets on the hilltops above, to slide into the heaven-sent ravine, at its top heavy and sluggish with snow and fog-cut ice, but lower more liquid, soon all but a waterfall.

Then, like so many logs in a spring run, they had come bumping and floating down—down and down through the terraced camp, grounding themselves somehow against the slippery banks when the goal was reached. And then, after the bloody rescue, out again into the icy water, and a swift descent to the river.

How had they known the tent's precise location? He shrugged. Pathans in the dark were devils, wizards. Through countless generations their predatory instincts had been sharpened to an almost superhuman degree.

General Fitzmaurice—and he must have known with what utter futility—cried, "A party—parties—follow them quick!"

Ralph Falconer turned to look at him, but his eye caught movement where presumably only dead men lay. Then he saw a Pathan in uniform rising from beneath those sagging, inert forms—rising turbanless, the lanterns highlighting a lump the size of a robin's egg over his left eye.

Fitzmaurice saw, too. For once his mustache was motionless. Surprise robbed him of words, but not for long. He sucked in a breath and flung balefully at Falconer:

"You and your trust! There's the man responsible, caught in his own web. Some little detail went wrong, it seems, and he's nailed red-handed." In his rage he mimicked the colonel:

" 'I'll stake my commission against his integrity!' " He leveled a shaking forefinger. "Well, you've lost! You and your precious jemadar. . . . What do you think of him now?"

A hush fell over the crowded tent, the expectant living rooted in their tracks, still as the new dead.

Ali Khan had found his turban, was rising to his feet. Somewhere a man sighed and, hoarsely repetitious, the water in the *nullah* was muttering:

"What do you think of him, what do you think of him, what do you think of him—now?"

IV. MESSAGE TO PESHAWAR

CUTTING through the almost unbearable tension, above the steady hiss and purl of water Ralph Falconer heard the uneven tread of men slogging along over broken ground, boots

squelching in the mud. Ironically now, the whole camp was astir.

Like a jack-in-the-box, a young aide suddenly popped his head through the canvas door flies.

"Those pursuit parties. All ready to tell 'em off, sir. Any special orders?"

With quick impatience, the general swept aside the idea, forgetful that it had been his own. He turned back to Falconer:

"Well?"

"Why not let Jemadar Ali Khan speak for himself?" The colonel asked Ali, in Pusshtu:

"How come you to be here, jemadar sahib?"

Fitzmaurice gave the Jowaki no time to answer.

"I'm not interested in any trumped up explanation. We've found him here. That speaks much louder than words!"

Ali's conversational English was sketchy—in a regiment where the sahib-log were all expert in his own tongue he used the white man's but seldom—yet there was little he did not understand. Vastly upset, very much in earnest, he moved toward Fitzmaurice.

"Sahib—"

"You and your precious jemadar. . . . What do you think of him now?"

"Chuprao!" The general flung the insulting Hindustani bazaar term at him. An unpardonable lapse: sahibs did not tell Indian officers to "shut up."

Ali stopped dead: his expression changed. He gave his colonel a quick sidelong glance.

Falconer shook his head warningly, deprecatingly, and said to Fitzmaurice:

"Some of the sentries must have seen Ali come here, must have talked to him. If you won't hear his explanation, you'll

believe what they say, won't you, sir?"

"Well, I'll listen," snapped the general.

Impossible. A quick check-up revealed that no one now living had seen Ali approach or enter the tent. One man, who had been stationed fairly near it, did say he had heard the two sentries outside the door in some sort of argument with an Indian.

"Didn't you investigate?" Fitzmaurice demanded.

The man explained that he had assumed it was only a *chah wallah*—a tea vendor—one of many camp followers who, having the run of the place, was apt to bob up with his wares at any hour.

"How long after the argument did you sense something was wrong?"

"Why, sir, seemed as if the row inside begun h'almost at once."

There was no questioning those two key men on the door. They were identified among the dead *inside* the tent.

"The whole rotten business is crystal clear," the general said bitterly. "Falconer, I thought at first Ali's warning was a mere attempt to curry favor—I told you as much—but I see now that his purpose was far more cunning. Ali foresaw the inevitable investigation that must follow, whether the delivery of Gool was successful or not. Ali's always known how I felt about him; yet had he not been knocked cold in this tent—the one eventuality he obviously didn't reckon on—I'll confess I might have been slow to implicate the very man who had warned us with such seeming frankness. Don't you see? That was what he most counted on.

"And consider how cleverly he was covering his tracks? In this fog he could sneak away from his own lines for a bit and return without being specially noticed. As to the Liverpools he spoke to here—well, they're dead. Naturally. That was part of the plan. This thing was timed to a hair, Falconer. While you came to me, Gool Mohammed was rescued. It worked to perfection."

The colonel protested, "But really, sir, you're making this up out of—"

"Don't interrupt! What, actually, was Ali's assignment? Why was he so vital to the scheme's success? It's very plain. It was necessary for someone in the camp to approach the sentries at the door and engage their attention. Obviously, the guards inside could hear and would have been listening; their attention was thus attracted to the *front* of the tent while Gool's rescuers tunneled in from the rear. Then? All at once the sentries arguing with Ali heard the beginning of the struggle and rushed in, only to be killed. And in that murderous confusion, Ali was inadvertently stunned. Consider also—"

Fitzmaurice expanded his theory still further, but the colonel no longer listened. He had heard enough to realize its damning logic. True? Not the point, that. It could be made to stick before any military court in the land. Worse! Here in the field Fitzmaurice himself could convene an immediate Summary General Court Martial, with power to mete out a death sentence.

Poor Ali! And yet—yet mentally tracking back, the first faint thread of doubt subtly twined itself about Falconer's thoughts. Was it, could it be possible that there had been a reason other than the plausible one given, behind Ali's reluctance to accompany him to the general's tent. Another motive? One that would dovetail with awful conclusiveness into Fitzmaurice's pattern of this bad night's work.

Falconer pulled himself up short. That—why, it struck at the very core of his trust in Ali. If this man, who had enjoyed his confidence as had no other Pathan, turned out to be false, then all the long years spent so patiently, so tolerantly, so hopefully amongst these strange people were probably nothing more than a mockery.

Ralph Falconer, prey to the gloomiest

reflections he could remember, stole a curious glance at Ali Khan. Face dark with passion, the jemadar's whole body was tense as coiled steel. And even as Falconer looked, one great hand, shaking uncontrollably, fumbled for something under his tunic.

The colonel moved quickly, but the knife was out and Ali leaped at the general with demoniacal fury.

The blade flashed down.

OUT shot Falconer's hard right fist—it cracked against Ali's wrist. Deflected, the knife sliced down the sleeve of the general's British warm as if the thick cloth were tissue. Off balance, Ali stumbled against his unharmed target. As Fitzmaurice staggered back, the Pathan righted himself, knife still in hand. But he was staring at the colonel now, the red lust to slay gone from his eyes.

He said with infinite reproach, "That you, O sahib, would protect a man who dishonors me!"

And then his face seemed to fly all to pieces. He looked away, and in a gesture of utter contempt, flung the knife at Fitzmaurice's feet. Spat after it. Turned. Ran from the tent.

"A close thing," the general said shakily. He made no attempt to thank the man whose quick action had probably saved his life. Instead, merely:

"You'll at once place Ali under close arrest. This attack on me is the clincher —were any needed." His pale, cold eyes swept them all, met the colonel's, held. "You agree, don't you?"

"That he's guilty of assault with intent to kill—yes; even though some might think you provoked it, sir." Falconer paused, added stonily, "As to the part he played in Gool's escape—well, nothing's proved. I—I don't know."

"You don't know?" Fitzmaurice laughed softly. "You don't—ah, well, it's immaterial. I suspect a court martial won't share your doubts. The same court, by the way, that'll try you both. I'm sure you haven't forgotten our conversation of the afternoon?"

They eyed each other, the bad blood of a lifetime between them.

"If it's a Summary Court of your convening," Falconer said slowly, "I can well imagine the verdict! But I shall demand a retrial—for us both. Meanwhile"—quizzically—"who knows what may happen when they get word at headquarters that Gool has escaped?"

The shot went home. Some of the arrogance fell away from the general. To wireless the bare, unequivocal news of the escape just at this time would be ruinous. No, that fatal wire must not go—just yet. This fog couldn't last much longer. It might lift before morning. There'd be some way of recapturing Gool, quickly. There *had* to be.

All at once the general realized that in permitting an awkward pause to follow Falconer's remark, he had allowed the situation to get slightly out of hand.

"That'll be all for the moment," he said brusquely. "Oh, and Falconer: after you have put Ali under arrest, you'll hand over to your Second-in-Command and consider yourself under open arrest. I'll have orders for the rest of you in the morning."

NOT far away—in fact, not a hundred feet from the crimson-splotched guard tent—the signaler on night wireless duty had just raised Peshawar. Recognizing the operator there as a crony by his sending style on the buzzer key, the man in the field tapped rapidly:

"Gool escaped tonight. Ten our chaps killed. Fitzy raising hell. Fog still bad. Expect official message shortly. Stand by."

As the man in Peshawar jotted down the words he heard footsteps; and saw his lieutenant, come to make a final night inspection. While personal conversations on service instruments were strictly taboo, the excited operator could not contain himself.

"Listen t'this, sir," he cried. "Gool Mohammed 'as given the Kohat column the slip!"

"Great Scott" the officer gasped. "Let's see the message."

"It—it ain't h'official," the man stammered. "I'm standin' by for the real message now. But wot I got is *pukka*, sir."

So startling was the news that the lieutenant either ignored or forgot the implied breach of discipline. Hastening to a telephone he called his superior, a major of Royal Signals.

The major lost no time in phoning the message to brigade; there a brigade major relayed it to his brigadier at the club.

And the brigadier, called from a bridge table where sat the G.O.C. First Peshawar Division, hastened back and told him.

The divisional commander rushed out to the same telephone and rang up the G.O.C., Northern Command, who was asleep in bed.

"God's grief," the big fellow exploded, suddenly very wide awake. "What's that incompetent ass Fitzmaurice playing at? Why, they only captured Gool Mohammed a few hours ago! Look here, Charlie, we'll have to do something about Fitzmaurice at once. See you in the morning."

So everybody knew. But there was no official message.

V. CONQUEROR'S PATH

IMMEDIATELY he regained his own lines, Falconer sent for Ali Khan. There was a long wait. When the subahdar major did finally return his face was grave.

The jemadar could not be found. An anxious search of the entire camp revealed that Ali was definitely missing.

A deserter!

Did this mean he was as guilty of conspiracy as he was of assault upon the general? It well could. All at once Falconer uttered a sharp exclamation. If Ali had been in league with Gool's men, his story of the warning brought in by his friendly cousin would wilt under investigation. Quickly Falconer questioned the senior subahdar of Ali's company.

"But yes, huzoor," the Jowaki replied. "This cousin of his, named Ruknuddin, is well known to us. Many saw him tonight, and several of us spoke to him."

Heartening words, for they made a seemingly straightforward story. The colonel's thoughts raced off on another tack. Although perhaps guiltless of any double-dealing, Ali might have deserted because he felt it impossible to get a fair trial from Fitzmaurice. Ali's strangely incriminating presence in the guard tent remained the big mystery. And even though he had some perfectly valid explanation, there were no witnesses to substantiate it.

Despite this, if he was to be helped, there had already been far too much delay. Mind made up, a plan rapidly taking shape, Falconer made short work of handing over to his second-in-command. This done, he made his way back to the general's tent, where he was at last given another bedside audience even more grudging than the first.

"Ali's desertion is stale news," Fitzmaurice snapped. "It's all of a piece with the rest, of course."

"Given a free hand, I might be able to get him back in short order," Falconer said surprisingly.

The general goggled at him. "What rot is this?"

"It's a hundred to one Ali headed for the village where his cousin is headman—chap who brought word of the plan to rescue Gool."

Fitzmaurice's mustache twitched. He said sourly, "That information was slipped to Ali by one of Gool's underlings. The yarn about his cousin was pure fabrication."

"No, sir." Ralph Falconer repeated what the subahdar had just told him.

That gave the other pause, but only for a moment.

"How do I know this precious relative and Gool's messenger weren't one and the same person? In any event, none of this has any bearing on the one fact that matters—the way we found Ali in that tent!"

That might not be strictly true. Yet the general's mind, Falconer perceived all too clearly, was as tight shut as a sprung trap. And precious time was slipping by.

"Very good, sir," the colonel forced himself to say easily, "let's assume Ali was the inside man, just as you think. There's another—"

"Anyway, Ali's case'll take care of itself. To hell with him. It—it's Gool I want. I can't afford to wait. Every hour—"

"Exactly, sir. And had you forgotten that Gool's rescuers had headquarters in the very village where Ali's cousin is headman?"

"You mean—"

"I mean, that village is well known to several of my Jowakis. They know this vicinity like a book. The fog would prove no hindrance to a small party of these fellows. The village could be reached in—well, an hour or two at most."

Fitzmaurice stared at him with fishy eyes, snorted. "You don't imagine for a second Gool's there now, do you?"

"No. But I think it was a logical rallying point after the rescue. If so, someone there would be almost bound to know which way Gool's crowd went. That information—it'd be priceless."

"It would, indeed," Fitzmaurice was forced to agree.

"Then let me take a party—"

"You! You're under arrest, relieved of all duty."

"Quite, sir," the colonel said patiently. "Yet in an emergency such as this, so long as I'm no longer in command of my regiment, I could slip away with a few Jowakis and be back, I dare say, by morning."

He hesitated with uncharacteristic diffidence. "I only suggest myself because the men—oh, hang it!—because I feel the men trust me and would go through for me, no matter what happened."

A sarcastic rejoiner was on the tip of the general's tongue, but he checked it. Whatever his personal feeling for Falconer, he knew those last words were true. More, he had a kind of bitter, reluctant confidence in the colonel's ability. The situation *was* desperate. Let the damned fool go. He might easily be killed, too; the possibility could be viewed with something more than equanimity.

"Very well, then," Fitzmaurice grunted, "I'll return you to duty until you get back." He could well have let it go at that, yet could not resist adding:

"But even if you succeed in getting the information, it won't help your case in the least."

Ralph Falconer gave him a level look, but made no reply. His lean, square hand snapped to his helmet. Then he was out of the tent, sliding and skidding as he ran through the mud.

THAT difficult, fogbound journey to the village had in it much of the terror of a bad nightmare. Never, from the time he had selected his men in the dim glow of swinging hurricane lamps, until the naik beside him laid a warning hand on his arm and the faint odor of wood smoke came to him through the choked air, had the colonel been able to see a single pace ahead.

Nor could he now. Highly nervous work, even with efficient guides. Of the twenty in the party, nineteen were sepoys who had known this bit of broken country since birth; the naik—the only N.C.O.—had been recruited from the village itself.

The rest were coming up now, each bumping softly into the man ahead.

The naik whispered, "Below us, sahib. I could almost pitch a stone upon the eastern wall."

"Lead on, then."

"*Nahin.* Best the sahib remain here. Even if the village is free of Gool and his men, the *mullahs* would never tolerate an Unbeliever within our gates. There would be grave danger. Best I go forward alone. If Ali Khan is there—"

"Make it clear that I come only as the friend he has long known."

"I understand. And if he is not there, I shall try to persuade his kinsman, Ruknuddin, to return here with me."

"Good. Go."

The tall young naik disappeared and Falconer passed back word to sit down. Once he heard the tinkling of a small, dislodged stone as it bounded downward, then—nothing, until all at once, a very genii sprung from the hill, the naik hovered over him.

"I have brought Ruknuddin," the Jowaki said simply.

"And Ali Khan?" the colonel asked quickly.

"Ruknuddin will explain, sahib," said the naik.

Still seated, the colonel found himself peering into the bearded face of Ali's kinsman; the man, turbanless, wore a *kullah* on his shaven poll.

"Speak, O cousin of my friend," Falconer invited.

Lightly hissing, Ruknuddin's hand slid down his butt-grounded rifle and he squatted, his knee brushing the white man's.

"I had no wish to come to you, *Angrezi.* For though glibly you call Ali Khan 'friend', you watched him drink the bitter cup of dishonor—aye, and when he went to avenge himself, it was you who changed the path of his just knife." He breathed disdainfully through his nose. "Yet do you dare come here claiming friendship! Well, it is so that Ali has been here—my words tell you that. But like Gool, he is gone."

"Gone Where?"

"Against my arguments, against the stern mandate of the *mullahs,* against all reason, my cousin persuaded fifty of our young men to follow him, to the end that Gool Mohammed might be again taken and delivered once more to the white intruders. Aie! What have you devils done to Ali Khan, that he pursues your interests long after your treachery has destroyed whatever claims upon his loyalty you may have had?"

"You do not understand, Ruknuddin."

"Do I not? Ha! This much I know: That this night's work has ruined Ali's chance of becoming chief in place of Gool Mohammed."

The colonel's heart beat fast. Did those implications connote a man who, only a few hours before, could have been guilty of conspiracy? Scarcely! He said impulsively: "You must tell us, Ruknuddin, the route Gool took—and Ali. We must know. We must follow!"

The headman rose abruptly. "Be off, false *ferenghi.* Get back into Hindustan —out of our land. I have no more words for you!"

"I must know the route," Falconer said firmly.

The muzzle of Ruknuddin's rifle nudged his stomach.

"Go quickly," the Jowaki commanded. He added contemptuously, unguardedly, "Of what avail the route to such as you? The English would not dare a pursuit into Afghanistan!"

The naik moved suddenly. "Huzoor! You hear? Then there is but one way they can have gone."

Livid, Ruknuddin turned his rifle on the naik.

"From you he shall never hear it."

But before he could squeeze his trigger, Falconer's Webley roared. The big slug took the headman full in the chest. He slumped to all fours, coughing. He was done.

"A rotten business," the colonel muttered, "but there was no other way."

FOR an instant they stood motionless, frozen by the unexpectedness of it all. In the village dogs barked; a swelling tide of men's voices floated up through the still air.

The naik said urgently, "That shot—the whole town will be on us. No time to lose, huzoor."

"No . . . No. I did not want to kill this man. It was your life or his."

"Kismet! Had I not spoken, he would still live . . . I had known him always, huzoor."

"Yes . . . You said, 'There is but one way they can have gone' ".

"Into Afghanistan, from here? But one. And it is a continuation of the very trail which brought us here. Since time immemorial, it has been known to us as 'Sikandar's Path'."*

Falconer thought: "The main column would move very slowly through this mist; probably wouldn't stir until it lifted. By then Gool will be over the border, out of reach."

The fog had changed from inky black to light gray as the naik hurriedly ordered the detail to fall in. On that crowded trail there was no attempt at orderly formation. Rifles slung, the men simply stood there in single file, headed east.

Though on pins and needles, the naik did not forget to give Falconer a smart rifle salute.

"Ready, sahib."

The colonel smiled a little. He had a day's growth of beard, his eyes were red rimmed with lack of sleep, his rugged features were deeply lined. But for all that, somehow his expression, his whole bearing, seemed singularly boyish.

"Not quite ready, I think. The men are faced the wrong way to march."

The naik looked at him queerly. "They face east, sahib—toward our main body."

"Head west," Falconer ordered grimly. "There is work to do."

VI. HILLMEN'S PACE

IT WAS close on noon when the hard driving party made its first halt. As the naik, Mirza Mohammed Hakim, reminded his colonel, there was little danger of a stern chase by villagers thirsting to avenge their headman's death. Ruknuddin's women had overheard the naik's initial conversation with the headman, in which Mirza had mentioned an immediate return to the main column; thus any pursuit by villagers would have gone tearing off to the east in the hope of cutting off the colonel's party before it could rejoin Fitzmaurice.

Yet need of sustained speed was imperative if Ali's party were to be overhauled; the jemadar, in turn, would be straining swiftly forward to apprehend Gool.

Above all, this: The Afghan border was only thirty miles away. No matter how pressing the circumstances, for a British officer to lead uniformed, armed men into the Amir's country would be an unthinkable breach of international etiquette. Did those ahead once cross the line they would be lost to Falconer.

He had had time to think that morning. Everything pointed to Ali's good faith save the one unescapable enigma: *What, in the name of all that was holy, had Ali been doing in that tent?*

No matter what Ali said, no matter how plausible his story, without witnesses to sustain him it would always be his mere say-so against that highly ineriminating circumstantial evidence.

*Sikandar: Alexander. The tribes claim many obscure, today little used trails and passes into Afghanistan as having been used by Alexander the Great during his hill campaigns. However, the main route traveled by his army entering India is well known. His departure was along the rivers of the Punjab to the sea.

Abstractedly the colonel broke out a Machonochie ration and ate it cold, while the men munched *chuppattis*. Presently Naik Mirza rose and approached his superior.

"Yes, Mirza?"

"Sahib, one forgotten circumstance of my visit to the village may be important. It is such, that I do not believe Ali Khan had more than an hour's start on us."

"An hour!" The colonel shook his head as he checked back. "Closer to four hours, I'm afraid."

"There was much delay, Ruknuddin said. It was not easy for Ali to persuade the young men to follow him. The *mullahs* exhorted against it at great length. But this is what slipped my mind: When I hailed the watchman he opened the gate grudgingly, protesting that only an hour before he had undone the great bars. That would have been to let Ali and his men out, I feel certain."

The colonel was impressed. "Even so," he sighed, "I doubt whether we've gained much on him."

"Be not too sure, huzoor. Gool is old and slow; the pace of his men would necessarily be that of the chief. Ali would not plan to overtake Gool here, where the trail is rising. Rather, he would hope to fall upon him further on, where the trail descends to the Afghan line. Gool had no great head start of Ali; Ruknuddin said so much."

In matters of hillcraft, Falconer reflected, it was always safe to trust Pathan logic. Mirza's manner showed some hesitancy.

"Say on," Falconer invited.

"I—we others, younger than the sahib, are born to this country. Yet the pace you have set has been worthy of our best, huzoor. If you could but continue it, I believe we might overtake Ali by darkness."

Smiling wryly, the colonel stood up.

"You are something of a diplomat," he told the pleased N.C.O.

But long before that heart-breaking afternoon of khud climbing ended, Falconer was traveling on his nerves alone. Sheer grit and an indomitable will were all that kept him putting one foot before the other. They had come twenty miles—little short of a miracle over such going. Fog still obscured the sun's burning rays, a factor greatly in the colonel's favor.

He was about to call another short halt when from the mist ahead a shot rang out, echoing endlessly down the valley. By a curious coincidence, simultaneously the fog parted enough to reveal several hundred yards of the trail.

Instantly the colonel waved his men to cover. Rocks were plentiful.

From behind a nearby boulder Mirza called hoarsely, "We have done it, sahib —that must be Ali!"

Falconer slid his whistle from its shoulder-strap pocket and blew three long blasts—the regimental field signal for "stand fast."

Tensely they waited for an answer. It came—the same three whistled blasts.

"Ali, right enough," said Falconer. "Only he and I have officers' whistles." He stepped back upon the trail, urged the men forward. The route wound up a hundred and fifty yards to disappear behind a jutting rock shoulder. As they advanced nothing moved, not a single figure showed.

The colonel, Naik Mirza at his elbow, was not twenty yards from the bend when, still invisible, Ali Khan spoke harshly.

"You have overtaken us, sahib, but hark to this: You will never get me alive. A word from me and we will kill you all."

"Do not speak that word," the colonel said. Alone he walked slowly forward. "I come as your friend, O jemadar."

Ali's huge torso rose above a nearby rock. His revolver swung significantly in his right hand.

"Would a friend stand by and see my *izzat* blackened, as you did? But

for you, that defamer would now be dead—as he should be!"

The colonel was still walking. "Your honor is in my keeping—as always. False accusation can never blacken the *izzat* of a guiltless man. And would it have been the act of a friend to stand idly by while your knife was driven home—to see all your years of worthy service become as dust in your mouth? You are too wise to think it!"

Ali stepped into the clear. "For what reason would you have followed but to arrest me?"

Falconer was but five paces from him. "Nothing is further from my thoughts than your arrest. Rather, with joined forces, let us go forward in a common cause." His eyes held the other's.

ALMOST imperceptibly, Ali's strained expression commenced to alter. Slowly, slowly his face went solemn with a curious exaltation; his mouth worked queerly, his head dropped.

And then occurred the unexpected—something which revealed the everlasting child in this strange race. Eyes blind with tears, Ali rushed at the colonel, wrapped great arms about him in an unashamed bear hug.

"Ah, sahib, my sahib, never did I really doubt you. But—but I was mad with rage. And it seemed—no matter, I am with you again!"

For a little while, rank forgotten, the two stood thus. As moved as they, the men of both parties shouted aloud, *"Wah, wah!"**

The colonel ordered a ten minute halt and he and Ali sat down together a short distance from the rest. It was then that Falconer told him the circumstances of Ruknuddin's death.

"It could not be helped," the Jowaki said stoically. "A curious man, my cousin. He was ever torn between my cause and the will of the *mullahs*. Ruknuddin loved me enough to bring that warning, risking life, yet when later I begged for men to follow Gool, he listened only to the priests and would have none of it. Allah guard him."

"And Gool?" the colonel prompted after a brief pause.

"Gool is not far ahead, sahib. Indeed, early this afternoon we heard what is left of his *lashkar*—Ruknuddin claimed less than a hundred men—moving along in the fog ahead. We were too close on this sharply upward trail. Did he turn, the advantage would have been all his. It was while we stopped to permit him to draw away that we heard you behind us."

"Gool must be taken before he crosses the border."

"True! I had forgotten I still wore the uniform. And with the sahib here, and others of the regiment—"

Ali studied the hills. The fog had almost disappeared. A huge, coppery-red disc, the sun seemed poised on the highest visible point to the west. "There, where the sun sinks, is the watershed. Beyond that point, the way is downward, into Afghanistan. We must take Gool tonight."

More forced marching. Ralph Falconer, with nothing left to give, reached deep into his soul for whatever untapped reserves of strength there might be. With enormous effort he stood up.

"Carry on," he said grimly to the jemadar."

Ali stepped away to give the order and the combined force marched off. The first of the evening breeze felt cool and good on the colonel's sweat-streaked face. Ali rejoined him at the head of the column.

"There is still a matter between us," Falconer said. "A grave matter indeed. Ali, my friend, I must know what you were doing in the guard tent last night. I shall believe whatever you tell me, but I must know."

*"Bravo!"

Ali turned and stared open-mouthed. "You cannot guess?"

"It is not a thing to guess at! If I am to help you, I must know. We must devise some means to overcome the unfortunate fact that you have no witnesses. You see—"

"*No witnesses, sahib?*"

The colonel was nettled. "You know they are all dead!"

Ali said, in an odd tone, "If Allah wills, when the time comes I shall make very clear my motive for going to the guard tent. And prove what I say!"

"What do you mean? How?"

"You trust me, sahib?"

"Of course. But your story—without witnesses—"

"'Without witnesses'—your words, sahib—not mine!"

It was one of those Eastern conversations that went maddeningly around in circles. Yet Ali's words carried some significance beyond the colonel's grasp. The jemadar seemed so sure of himself, yet so reluctant to divulge what was in his mind, that the colonel suddenly decided to pursue the matter no further, although he was more at sea than ever. By direct order he could probably force Ali to speak, but he knew that was no way to handle this particular Pathan officer.

They reached the top of the divide in the last of the spring dusk. The temperature had fallen sharply, yet not enough to freeze the perpetual slush underfoot. Below stretched a magnificent panorama: valleys delicately shadowed in a gamut of colors from lavender to blue-black and backed by the snow-capped immensity of the Hindu Kush ranges towering austerely above their own. But if the cold beauty was impressive it was also disappointing, for the valley floors were still obscured by rolls of coiling mist.

"I had hoped we might see Gool's campfires from here," Ali said, as he snapped the cover on useless binoculars.

"You think he would light fires?" the colonel asked.

"Yes—not dreaming anyone is so close behind him. Yet there is the chance that he heard that shot. If so, he might set a trap. Could we make sure there are no fires—but since the fog makes that impossible, from now on ours is a task of blind stalking."

WHILE they halted for a little food, hoping meanwhile the breeze might clear the fog from the valley floors, it grew dark. Naik Mirza and a sepoy equally familiar with the country were pushed out ahead, and the rest followed at a fifty yard interval, moving with slow caution.

Falconer's tortured muscles stiffened in the cold night air. He kept on as best he could. A moonless, star studded sky seemed almost within reach, soft as the sooty velvet of a woman's gown dusted with sequins.

An ambush? One well planned was like a motor accident. There was no premonition, no warning. Webleys drawn, Falconer and Ali led down into the unknown. An hour passed, two. Twice during the nerve-wracking descent Mirza and his companion had halted to make contact with those behind. But a long time had passed since the second meeting—too long?

All at once with a faint hiss, Ali froze.

"What is it?" the colonel whispered.

"A sound—I do not know."

From the gloom of the trail ahead a figure rose—came toward them. Mirza.

"A lookout," the naik muttered. "By good luck, we came upon him before he had a chance to run off or fire. Our bayonets did the rest."

"Gool will be close," Ali said.

"Insh'Allah—please God," Mirza murmured. "The stream marking the boundary is a scant mile from here. If Gool once crosses the ford—"

From the gloom of the trail ahead a figure rose.

VII. THE FIGHT AT THE FORD

DID the presence of that lookout mean that Gool had camped on the near side of the stream? That the wily old chieftain would do anything so stupid, so tactically wrong, seemed impossible to Ralph Falconer. Rather, it must mean that Gool had set a trap. The very unexpectedness of the maneuver at this point would be strongly in its favor.

If in ambush just ahead, Gool would be relying upon a warning from his lookout—a warning he would never receive. So much to the good.

"Assuming Gool is between us and the stream," Falconer asked the naik, "would it be possible for part of our force to detour the trail, circling Gool, and thus cut him off when he tries to cross the ford?"

Mirza considered. "Possible, yes, sahib; but such a detour would be so cut across by deep gorges that the move would consume hours. Far too many, I fear."

"That's out, then." He frowned, thinking fast. "Well, I want a reliable man—a villager, because he will not be in uniform—who in the darkness might pass as the dead lookout. Let this man run boldly forward, as if driven in. The second he spies any of Gool's men, let him bring back word, if possible. If impossible, have him fire a shot. Meanwhile, we'll move slowly on."

Mirza was in the best position to make the important selection—Ali's party was composed of the naik's fellow townsmen—and at once he did so. The Jowaki chosen kicked off his slippers and went off at a silent lope.

The rest resumed their cautious advance. But not for long.

With a great rattling of stones and splashing of slush, the Jowaki runner

came flying back, closely followed by several white robed figures. It was obvious that they were trying desperately to cut him off without firing any shots.

Seeing the head of the advancing column, they must have realized that further efforts at surprise were futile; they stopped dead, let go a harmless volley, and turned tail.

Falconer and his men rushed forward.

The trail veered off half-left. Beyond the partial turn every rock leaped to life with spurting orange fire.

Robbed of its unexpectedness, the attempted ambush instantly changed to a slashing, running dogfight, friend and foe hopelessly tangled on the steep sided trail.

Down and down they plunged, like some mad, hurtling rapids churning frantically in a too-narrow bed. Soon all were partially enveloped in the thinning valley mist—a wild, confused mass of straining bodies, of upraised knife arms, of swinging rifles, of sudden point-blank shots—and above the pound and swish of running, slipping feet, groans, curses, shouts, screams.

Falconer, Ali and Mirza, a relentless spearhead, cut through almost to the head of the whirling mêlée.

Mirza panted: "Stream—ford—just ahead!"

But Gool? Suddenly they saw him. Center of a phalanx of a dozen picked men, the old ruffian was bobbing along at his best pace.

With a mighty splashing they drove into the icy stream, slowed. Falconer saw Gool stumble, go down. He was jerked to his feet; waded on until the water was thigh high. A swift current ploughed against him, undercut his feet. Again he fell, and this time vanished.

His special twelve fished about for him hurriedly; failing to find him, fatalistically they abandoned further search. It was written, it was the will of Allah. Save themselves! Some reached the further bank, others were swept downstream.

But now the whole mass of men came charging into the swollen stream. The colonel, fighting for his life, never quite knew when Ali disappeared.

Everywhere the cry went up, "Gool is dead, Gool has fallen!"

The affair ended abruptly then. One instant the stream and its near bank were thickly dotted with fiercely struggling men, the next, what remained of Gool's *lashkar* had performed the well known Pathan trick of vanishing like ashes in high wind.

Ralph Falconer waded slowly back to the bank, reloading his Webley the while.

"Ali," he called. "Ali Khan. Ali!"

Mirza half sat, half lay just clear of the water, wiping blood from his cheek.

"Like many another, I fear he will not answer, sahib."

"You saw him killed?"

Mirza stood up. "No, sahib. But he is gone. I assume drowned."

Sighing deeply, the colonel knocked water from his whistle and blew a rallying blast. A hollow victory. All this terrific effort, all these lives—for what?

"Listen!" Mirza cried.

Far downstream—a whistle. Mirza was off ahead of his colonel.

The sight which presently met their eyes was almost unbelievable. Old Gool lay flat on his stomach in the soft snow, while Ali Khan, kneeling on his back, hopped up and down like a sparrow on a hot tin roof. From the chief's stained beard a thin trickle of water issued. Ali glanced up, paused briefly.

"Thank God you're safe!" the colonel said.

Ali said enigmatically, "Little did I ever think the day would come when this man would be worth more to me alive than dead!"

With that, he resumed his rough first aid for immersion.

"But what happened?" Falconer demanded.

Ali answered between hops. "In stream—I had—eyes only for Gool.

When he went down—second time—his men did not allow for current. But—I did. I dragged him out—down here!"

Old Gool groaned, stirred, feebly raised a hand.

"He will live for the hangman of the Raj," Ali said. "And for something else."

MIRZA shivered. "There should be a small stand of deodars nearby. A roaring fire from dead branches—

"Get that fire started!" The colonel was shivering, too.

Not long thereafter, in various stages of undress, the whole force sat about a heartening blaze. Wounds were tended. They talked, ate, slept. And were on the march an hour before dawn, their valuable prisoner fully recovered.

With the fog gone, the air force resumed interrupted flights from Risalpur—and flew over the colonel's little column shortly after daylight. Lacking equipment, there was only one way to communicate with those aloft: Ralph Falcomer semaphored with his arms.

The message he sent was necessarily brief:

Gool retaken. Ali Khan here. Falconer, Colonel.

One of the planes zoomed low and the pilot waved an arm in acknowledgment.

"And now," the colonel mused, "for the battle royal with Fussy Fitzmaurice!"

They met sooner than Falconer expected. Just before nightfall, seated on a large gray transport mule, the general came fuming up in the middle of his advance guard, mustache twitching more furiously than ever. The two parties came together on the trail.

Falconer saluted. "You came fast, sir," he said pleasantly.

"Came soon as our wireless picked up the message sent Peshawar by this morning's scout planes," the general growled. "Didn't want to lose the prisoner again." He climbed stiffly from the mule.

"See here, Falconer. Word of Gool's escape somehow got about in Peshawar. I don't know how. Damned unfortunate to say the least. I—er—fact is, the G.O.C. has relieved me of this command because of it. 'Pending investigation' was the phrase used. They—ah"—the mustache was going a hundred to the minute—"they've ordered me to hand over to you as the next ranking officer of the expedition. Under the—hum—the circumstances, for the moment I'll ignore the officious manner you've taken matters into your own hands and that you were to have been under arrest upon your return."

Falconer nodded with no change of expression. "Sorry this has worked out so badly for you, sir."

"Oh, don't misunderstand me," the general snapped, more in his usual manner. "Now more than ever—call it simple self-protection, if you like—I'm preferring those charges against you and Ali Khan the instant we get back to Peshawar. The evidence in that tent proves the jemadar guilty of conspiracy; I have twenty witnesses to that and to the subsequent attack upon me. All caused through your gross negligence!"

Ali Khan nudged the colonel's elbow.

"May I speak, sahib?"

"No!" roared the general.

"Yes," said Falconer quietly.

"Huzoors," Ali said, with a malevolent side glance at Fitzmaurice, "on the night Gool escaped, I was given no chance to clear myself. Merely because I was found in the tent, the commanding officer said many things offensive to my ears.

"This is what took place. Fearing the general sahib's procrastination would nullify my colonel's warning, yet knowing how imminent was the attempt to free Gool, I went to the guard tent, myself to warn the sentries. They thought I had gone mad—they would not listen. We argued. To no avail. Then we heard

sounds of a fierce struggle in the tent.

"It was perhaps too late. We rushed in, I in advance. Rifle clubbed, one of Gool's people stood waiting just inside the door. I had time to see the rifle descending; then I remembered nothing more until I heard the talk of sahibs. A dead British soldier lay across me. I pushed him aside and stood up. Then—but the rest you know."

"A fine, likely story," Fitzmaurice sneered. "You disappoint me, jemadar. I had anticipated more originality." Mustache working overtime, he was obviously enjoying the moment. Pointing a finger at Ali, he asked the inevitable, climatic question. "If that is your tale, *where is your proof?*"

The colonel held his breath.

Ali smiled—it seemed almost carelessly. He glanced over his shoulder. "Ohé, Naik Mirza, have them bring forward Gool Mohammed."

THE old chief was dragged before them. Nervously stroking a filthy matted beard, his red little rat eyes darted suspiciously from one face to another.

Like a good showman, Ali waited several seconds.

"Gool Mohammed," he said suddenly, "Gool, you dirty old man, we have never been friends, you and I, have we?"

The chief's eyes flashed murderously. "Friends—we?" He spat. "God's curse on you, Defiler of the Faith!"

Ali smiled a little. "It seems he admits we are not friends. Now, chief-that-was, just before you escaped from the tent you heard voices outside it?"

Gool was puzzled. "What if I did?"

"My voice?"

The memory was too much for the old man. He burst into a torrent of words. "Yes—yes, cringer to these white Unbelievers who eat the flesh of swine, mongrel that you are! You did your utmost to spoil the plan. And had those silly fools heeded you, I should never have been rescued." He stopped. The wild look in his eyes was replaced by one of bitter resignation. "Yet it all makes little difference—now."

Ali, without a glance at the general, spoke to his colonel.

"Sahib, is it enough?"

Enough, indeed! Ralph Falconer restrained an impulse to hurl his helmet into the air and give three cheers.

Weakly, like the last squib in a bunch of exploded firecrackers, Fitzmaurice muttered something about assault.

"Oh, come," the colonel said good naturedly. "You ought to know how the Big Fellow feels about sahibs who insult Indian officers. Some of the things you said to Ali would take a deal of explaining to the G.O.C., wouldn't they?" He let that sink in, then added kindly:

"Best forget the whole thing, sir. And please know I'll do everything I can for you when I get before that Court of Enquiry you seem headed for."

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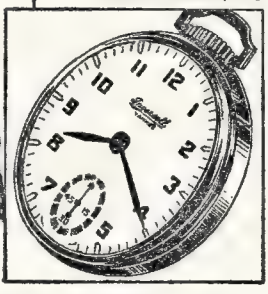
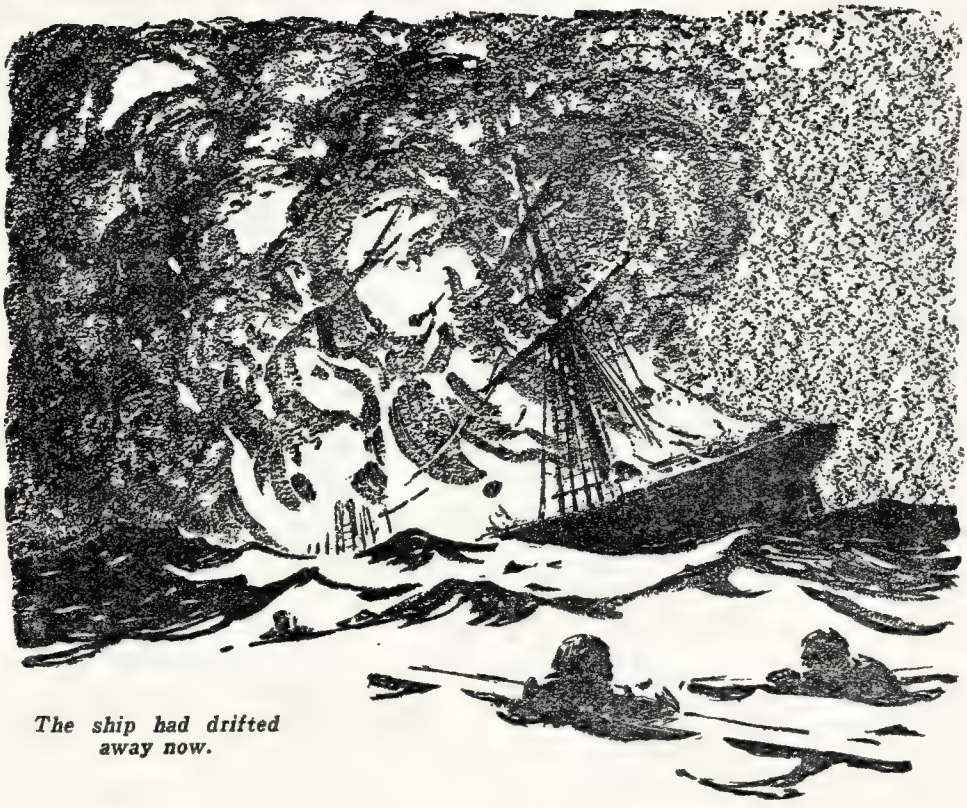




The ship had drifted away now.

SPIT AND POLISH

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

THE conflict between the old and the new will go on in ships as long as there remains an old-timer afloat; and by the time the last survivor of sail has slipped his mortal cable the new will have become the old and there will be another new to carry on the argument until the sea dries up. It has always been so. It always will be so.

Captain Bruce, and Mr. Hopkins his chief mate, standing ten paces apart on the forty-foot-long poop of the ancient *Star of Anchuria* a few minutes before the sun reached meridian, presented a contrast which told the story.

Mr. Hopkins stood on widely-spread legs, shoulders hunched up, clutching his sextant as he might a marlinespike, his face puckered. his body swaying to the lift of the deck. A disreputable cheese-cutter cap was jammed down on his head, the peak behind, and a rope-yarn of hair which looked as if it had never known a brush hung from the edge of the cap and touched his shaggy eyebrows. His rusty and ragged cardigan jacket flapped over a pair of soiled, shapeless trousers, which barely reached as far as a pair of faded carpet slippers. A few inches of hairy, bony ankles intervened.

Captain Bruce might have dropped from the clouds into the wrong ship. Slim, good looking, of almost boyish grace, he was dressed with the scrupulous exactness of a liner commander.

His sextant glittered with every new gadget, he handled it with the delicacy of a keen enthusiast in the finer art of up-to-date navigational science.

His uniform cap lay on the skylight, and a glove peeped over the rim. One perfectly pipe-clayed shoe rested on the lower bar of the pipe rail; his body responded easily to the ship's motion. In one sleeve of the smart jacket was tucked a spotless linen handkerchief; from the breast pocket the corner of a tasteful silk handkerchief protruded.

"Make eight bells, Mr. Hopkins," Captain Bruce requested as the sun commenced to dip. The mate motioned to the timekeeping boy, who banged four double strokes on the bell and darted down the ladder to get his dinner.

The captain carefully clamped the index of his instrument, picked up his glove and cap, and moved to the companionway. The second mate appeared on the last stroke of the bell, and while both mates stood together for a moment to pass on the course and details of deck work in progress, Captain Bruce spoke from the companionway in a quiet, cultured voice which did not reach beyond the men addressed:

"I wish you gentlemen to keep discipline. It need not be neglected even in a sailing ship. I see no reason why the forecastle bell should not be struck immediately the poop bell gives the time, nor why the boy cannot wait until he is relieved. Please see to it."

HE PASSED below, and Mr. Jones chuckled. Mr. Hopkins slowly put down his sextant, stuck both hands into his pockets, and blew.

"Thirty years of deep water—me!—and never have I been ticked off like that, Jones! I never got myself up like a brassbound monkey, but I know my work, I can make this ship sail, and she won't sail no better whether the foc'sle bell's struck or not! Why the hell did he have to come to sea in this ship? Why didn't he stay where he belongs, in them shiny liners, instead o' robbing a decent sailorman of his dues?"

Mr. Jones flicked an imaginary speck of dust from his sleeve. He had copied his immaculate skipper more than he realized. He did not answer the mate, because he had heard it all before.

"Silk handkercher and gloves! Brass buttons, and, 'Please, Mr. Hopkins, see the foc'sle bell's struck prompt!' Polishin' the bleedin' brasswork too, in an old ballyhoo goin' out to be turned into a hulk! Mark my words, Jones, first time we have a sneezer he'll pop on deck in galoshes with an umbereller!"

There was reason for the mate's discontent. After lying for years in the creek at Oakland along with the diminishing Packers' fleet, the *Star of Anchuria* was sold to be converted into a hulk in Noumea. Mr. Hopkins had been chief mate of her for longer than he liked to remember, and when she was laid up he had been glad of the job of caretaker, shipping being in a bad way and he no steamboat sailor.

There was always the chance that she would be sold abroad, and then naturally he would be the man to take her wherever she went. For years, while watching other fine old ships depart, he had counted on that. Now, by some favor of relatives or influence with people concerned in the ship, here came Captain Bruce to gouge a sailorman out of his rightful job.

Bruce didn't need the bit of money the job would bring. He didn't need the chance of a first command. He needed nothing. He was already master of as fine a liner as plied the Pacific, certain to fly his commodore's swallowtail in no very great time. Took this voyage in his vacation, a busman's holiday, simply, he had said, to renew his boyhood acquaintance with sail and see for himself if the romance remained and the hardship was ever necessary.

Mr. Hopkins never allowed his rancor to interfere with his appetite. A sailor's

food was a good part of his remuneration, and the more he ate the more he got for his work; but he ate his dinner gloomily, letting Captain Bruce do all the talking, which at mealtimes rarely concerned the commonplaces of ship's work.

A man accustomed to entertaining passengers was not at a loss for table talk. He discussed star navigation, great circle sailing, and Hopkins contented himself with grunting monosyllabic replies, and scowling at the steward, an amazing apparition in a sailing ship, his face shining with soap, his hair plastered down with more soap, his alpaca jacket, clean shoes, and, yes, clean hands.

But when, after dinner, he knocked at the captain's door with the result of his noon and forenoon observations for comparison, Mr. Hopkins was all set for conflict. Captain Bruce was almost disarming.

"You may find this useful, Mr. Hopkins," he said, proferring a brand new cardigan jacket. "It's new. I have no use for it."

"Much obliged, sir," growled Mr. Hopkins. "I ain't in need of clothes. The mate of a sailing ship's got no time to play dude, not if he looks after his work. Give it to the second mate. He takes more notice of the set of his pants than he does of the set of a tawps'l. Here's my figures."

For a moment Captain Bruce's eyes hardened, then he smiled. He folded the garment very precisely, and laid it on the bunk, and while he compared his figures with the mate's he spoke quietly:

"The younger generation of officers are beginning to see the possibilities of their profession, Mr. Hopkins. In these fast moving days they look forward to something better than sailing ships. Fine schools, but fast vanishing. I don't say that smart clothes make a smart seaman; but I cannot believe that to be a good officer it's necessary to look like a ragbag. A man can handle an emergency as well in a clean collar as without."

While Hopkins looked about ready to burst at the mention of ragbag, Bruce picked up a handsome pair of binoculars and quietly pointed to an inscription on a silver plate which expressed the appreciation of a foreign Government for Captain Bruce's courage and resource in saving the crew of a gale battered ship.

Mr. Hopkins was unimpressed. He picked up his calculations and made for the door.

"I got three of them things!" he snorted. "Show 'em to you if you like. I never wore a collar at sea in my life."

HE SHUT himself in his room and hoped for dirty weather, which he heartily hated, in order that he might show this gingerbread skipper that other things went into the making of a seamen besides brass buttons, shiny shoes, and yellow gloves. He had spoken the simple truth when claiming to have earned those tributes to his courage and seamanship. There was nothing wrong with his ability in any branch of the sailor's business. Usually he was able to recognize ability in other men, whether in sail or steam, for knowing the sea as he did he appreciated the keen skill required to handle those giant liners which he had so often watched passing in and out while keeping his grimy vigil from a mud berth in the creek.

There was more than skill, too; a man had to be something besides a clever navigator to conduct all the involved business inseparable from the voyages of turbine monsters of thirty thousand tons or more, carrying perhaps a thousand passengers and ten million in gold specie.

But this transplanted liner captain made him gag. Here was an ancient ruin of a windjammer, ready for the knackers, sold to be a hulk, stiffened for sailing only by a few thousand cases of naphtha consigned to the buyer of the

ship and shipped in her to save the higher freight of a sounder bottom, and such a crew as one might expect to get for such a voyage. And Bruce must run all hands ragged getting dented brasswork cleaned and keeping it gleaming, holystoning scarred and grubby decks which had never known a broom for ten years—while any seaman knew he ought to give his attention to the gear, which had long outlived its prime.

The devil of it was that he did keep watch on the gear; he had eyes like a cormorant for an Irish pennant or a chafed rope; he would order a bit of running gear to be cut and spliced long before it would have broken, and it was creepy to see the way he detected rovings adrift on some lofty yard without ever leaving the deck. The gear must be kept ship shape, certainly—and the ship kept clean too.

The mate's usually dreamless sleep was ruined for that watch. When he was called he had just reached the middle of a gorgeous dream in which Captain Bruce had been swinging, nervous and helpless, between wind and water, and Mr. Hopkins was driving him aloft with salty language.

Mr. Hopkins rubbed his eyes when he reached the poop and stood beside the second mate. Mr. Jones was gazing aloft, frank admiration in his red face.

"Riggin' one of those radio sets," Mr. Jones volunteered. "That'll be a bit of a change, won't it? I like a spot of news at sea. May get music too."

Captain Bruce had asked no man to help. He scarcely expected to find a radio expert in that crew, and he was right. Even in rigging the aerial he was self-sufficient, and while the mate stared at his natty figure at the mizzen truck the insulator was fitted, the wire from the main truck drawn up, and the captain came flashing down to the deck by way of a royal backstay. He landed almost on top of the mate, smiled, glanced aloft at his work, then sadly inspected his hands.

"I ought to have worn gloves," he remarked, and went to work passing his lead-in wire.

It was the radio which brought warning of that dirty weather Mr. Hopkins had hoped for. That was something new again, but this time the mate had nothing bad to say about it, so said nothing. He would have said something, perhaps, about the shortening of sail before the wind had fairly got up steam, but his better judgment reminded him that the canvas had been lying in store for years, rolled up, unaired, and undoubtedly rotten; and very soon after the warning was received his old sea-wise nose recognized signs in an otherwise flawless sky which another man might never have noticed.

When the dirty weather did come, it would come all of a heap. And so it did.

A sultriness hung over the sea. A mild breeze brought up a haze through which the setting sun burned red and the moon never pierced. A heavy swell began to tumble the old ship and wring tormented protests from her. Along in the first watch the breeze veered, and a gale piped up. Mr. Hopkins revelled in it, and waited, but as yet no umbrella appeared on the poop. Captain Bruce watched his ship's behavior with interest, clad in a faultless black oilskin, glistening with wet, his slim legs encased in well fitting rubber boots, peering squarely into the storm as devoid of anxiety as he ever was when shaking out a napkin at table.

But Mr. Hopkins found plenty to do without watching the captain. Canvas and gear began to yield to the strain. The reefed main topgallant sail exploded with a hollow report and flogged the spar with its streamers.

"Don't try to save it. Cut it away!" ordered Bruce, who knew the futility of trying to save rotten canvas. It was an old tradition of the sea to save everything, but this was not worth saving, certainly not worth risking men's lives.

BY MIDNIGHT it was all hands, and both mates. The old spars wouldn't stand it. From single-reefing the upper topsails, the harried crew were driven to the heavier job of reefing the big foresail. Still further, at the captain's quiet suggestion, to goose-winging the main topsail and heaving the ship to, with a vicious cross sea breaking on board and making life precarious.

Through it all the mate's ragbag figure led the way to every rope to be hauled, he was in the bunt of the foresail in furling, he passed the lashing on the goose-winged topsail. His ancient oilskins flapped and ripped in the wind, buttonless, kept about him only by a soul and body lashing; his old cheesecutter cap was kept on his head by a lashing of rope-yarns under his chin.

Men cursed him, and he laughed at them. Mr. Jones, long a stranger to such work as this, glanced longingly and often at the calm figure on the poop while forced for very shame to follow the example of the ragbag mate.

Mr. Hopkins' eyes glittered with the enthusiasm of a true old salt; he needed no orders, he knew what had to be done and how to do it; when the last man was down from aloft, the last rope made up and hung clear of the entangling seas, the mate knew that he had done a man's job and done it well. He cast a last look around, bade the men find shelter, and clawed his way aft.

"Now we'll see what Shiny Shoes has to say," he muttered. "He'll be wanting to run to his bunk!"

A forty-ton grayback rose hissing at the waist, its steep slope laced with little running rivulets of foam; it seemed almost gentle in the instant when a sudden send ahead kept the ship level with it; then it dropped aboard.

The ship trembled to her keelbolts; her maindeck was filled, a pile of heavy planks was swept from the top of the midship house, and Mr. Hopkins was beaten from his clutch on the poop ladder to be overwhelmed in a maelstrom of raging sea and murderous timber. He would never have been caught had his mind been on his business.

A thump on the head from the butt of a pine plank made him open his mouth; the bitter salt sea filled him like a water bag; in one swift glimpse as his head emerged he saw the second mate clinging to the boat gallows foolishly trying to untangle a rope to throw to him. Then Mr. Hopkins went under again, and he felt the whole Pacific Ocean lifting him, bearing him away, beating him with pine sticks thirty feet long and twelve inches wide and two inches thick. He knew they were that size, would have known even if he had had not handled them in port, for every inch and every foot of every plank seemed to pick a spot on his body and land on it.

One such spot hurt savagely, and he shot a hand at it. His hand fastened upon a wrist so slim that it was incredible to think any hand attached to it could hurt him so. Planks fell apart, the sea sank about him, and upside down, belching water, Mr. Hopkins went bumping up the ladder at the heels of a shapely pair of rubber clad legs.

"Nearly got caught that time," a voice said cheerfully. "She won't take another like that aboard. I've fixed her. Better go below and dry off. You've about lost your oilskins, too. Take my spare coat—"

The mate dashed water from his eyes and met the humurous scrutiny of Captain Bruce. A narrow gleam from the chartroom lamp shone upon him, slick and comfortable in a strange garment the like of which Mr. Hopkins had never seen, a one-piece boiler-suit affair, of oiled silk, beginning in a close fitting hood, fastened down the front with a zipper, and terminating in a pair of soles attached to the fabric. It fitted almost like the man's skin; it held no windage; it was impervious to water, no hindrance to movement.

Mr. Hopkins' oilskin was in rags, water still poured from him, the least movement he made sent water spurting from his boot tops. The sight of that comfortable, unruffled new style seaman infuriated him. He could not fashion a word of thanks for having been hauled clear of a nasty mess. He would not try. He saw the wheel untended, and blew up violently.

"I'm no gingerbread sailor, sir. Drop o' water don't frighten me. I'll go below when my watch is up. You tried to drown me by leaving the ship untended! Where's the helmsman?"

"No need for a helmsman," Bruce returned shortly. "I adjusted the helm myself. If you won't go below for a spell I may as well leave you in charge. You're a fool, though. I never saw a finer bit of seamanship than you did in snugging her down, but I'm afraid you're set in your ways. A donkey knows no better. He's a donkey."

"You calling me a donkey—?" shouted Hopkins.

But Captain Bruce had left him. The mate saw him through the chart room porthole, fiddling with the knobs of his radio set, looking as if the ship no longer existed for him. He was even laughing, he was tapping on a key. Mr. Hopkins swore and staggered aft to the untended wheel. What he found there kept him fuming for half an hour until he forgot Bruce, the man, in this fresh evidence of his frivolity.

HERE was a queer gadget indeed. The mate snorted with contempt even while his sea-sense told him the thing was working. He had seen something like it on model yachts sailing on a pond. Bruce would think of a toy like that, and coolly leave his ship to its care while she battled with a tremendous sea and put the lives of men at a discount.

Under the gratings, where the wheel chains were shackled to the short iron tiller, Bruce had rigged an arrangement of small bronze blocks and flexible wire rope, attached to a pair of small steel cylinders no bigger than sections of handspike. The infallibility with which a heavier yaw of the ship was met by an extra inch of tiller sweep. to be checked without shock by the cylinders, convinced Mr. Hopkins that the invention was good.

He watched it almost fascinated, hoping that it would fail as he saw the ship's head fall off, come up until the goose-winged topsail shivered, and fall off again. It did not fail. The slight-looking blocks and wire held the heavy old ship as a light rein and cunning bit holds a fractious horse. It was fine, it was clever; and yet Mr. Hopkins knew that such gear had never been found in the stores of the *Star of Anchuria.*

Bruce had brought it on board himself, he had brought that gear to play with on this play-time voyage which would have meant so much to a real seaman who needed the credit of a first command.

The mate hated the skipper in the moment of that thought as he had never hated a man in his life. He glowered down at the gadget. If he just loosened the turns of the wire on the bitts . . . .

Jones would be on watch very soon. He would never know, he was so imbued with admiration for the dandy skipper that he would never think of criticising or even closely inspecting the gadget. He would trust to it utterly. Then there would soon be a call for real seamanship!

Mr. Hopkins walked over to windward, and stooped down.

"Eight bells, Mr. Hopkins!" Captain Bruce called from the chartroom. "I'll call the second mate. Please strike the bell."

Hopkins jumped guiltily. He hurried to strike the bell. There was no answering stroke from forward, and he went to the fore poop rail to whistle for a man to call the watch below. Mr. Jones ap-

peared, dry, comfortable, and happy.

"All right, Mr. Hopkins. I know all about the wheel gear. Have a good sleep. Captain Bruce is all to the good, isn't he? I've been listening to the *Presidio* talking to us on the radio. Great invention. They were dancing last night, while we were up in the branches busting our soulcases furling wet canvas."

"We'll all dance in Fiddlers' Green before long, if Bruce has his way!" growled Mr. Hopkins, and dragged his ragbag body below in rage.

"Here's something to warm you up, Hopkins," Bruce greeted him, holding towards him a tumbler full of reeking hot whisky. But Mr. Hopkins was not to be softened by alcohol, ardently though his chilled body reacted to the pleasant aroma.

"I don't need Dutch courage," he said ungraciously. "More to the point if you'd served out grog to the men. I never heard of a all-hands job in dirty weather without it. One o' your new ideas, I s'pose, like brasswork in a hulk."

"That was a pity, I agree. Unfortunately no rum was put on board for the crew. This is my own. I'd gladly issue it, but it wouldn't go round once."

Bruce regarded the mate curiously, as if understanding had recently come to him. "I hate to think I've put your back up, Hopkins. You're too fine a seaman to be made unhappy by a grouch. When I asked to be permitted to take this old ship to her last port I'm afraid I didn't realize what it meant.

"It seemed an amusing way for a liner commander to spend a vacation, renewing boyhood memories. I had a few ideas, too. One of them you saw working on the helm. Another was the radio. I've been talking to my own ship, the *Presidio*, comparing her behavior with ours.

"She's got the gale too, you know. I expect she'd have sighted us tomorrow if we'd held our course, but we're hove-to, sticking our nose twice into the same hole, and she carries mail; she won't waste time just to look at her master playing at sailors. And that's the trouble. I see it now. I'm playing, it's your life work. I'm sorry. But what's begun must be finished, Mr. Hopkins. The voyage has to be completed, and for better or worse I'm master of the ship.

"I'd like to make the voyage in peace. I shall do my very best to see that you lose nothing you might have gained if instead of myself you had been in command. You told me it was foolish to insist on keeping brasswork clean and holy-stoning decks in a ship going to be turned into a coal hulk. I think you were right. We won't bother about it. I know I can depend on you to keep the ship in sound working order. The bells must be struck, or the watches will take advantage of slackness. The lookout—did the lookout report the lights burning properly at eight bells? I didn't hear."

"What would I be doing if he didn't?" demanded Mr. Hopkins, still belligerent.

"Very well. Suppose we leave matters as they are until the breeze moderates. We'll try to make things easier when fine weather comes again. It won't be long. I had a report by radio just before the aerial carried away from the main-truck."

"You ain't hinting I send a man aloft to fix that? Damn plaything! I could have told you the gale's going to peter out before noon without that gadget."

"If you had fixed it it wouldn't have come down," Captain Bruce said with a smile. He was doing his noble best to soothe the angry mate, but with no success. "I'll put it up again myself in daylight. It's only a plaything, as you say. Turn in, now. I've kept you from your bunk long enough."

WHILE Mr. Hopkins slept the sleep of a weary man, and Captain Bruce's clever gadget made of the second mate's watch a matter of simply keeping a look-

out and marking the time so that his period of duty be not overrun, in the warm galley the men of both watches smoked and grumbled and cursed the ship, her rotten gear, her dude captain, and the leaky forecastle where all their bedding and gear lay ruined.

"We must be a bunch of mugs, lettin' that sissy play liners in this old windbag. Brasswork and holystoning! No more for me!"

"Who's goin' to pay fer our gear? That's what I arsk you. Two months pay gorn to hell!"

"Yes, you spent two months pay on gear! Seven weeks worth o' steam beer, and you pinched the rest off a clothes line! The other week's pay you give to Liverpool Liz."

"Steam beer! Wish I had some now. No grog for a all-hands job! Foc'sle drowned out, long o' the breadbarge and my bit o' meat I put by for night watch! Nothink in the bleedin' galley, neither. Lockers is clean. The Doctor's like the rest o' them hoodlums aft."

"The Old Man's got whisky. I see him 'avin' a tot through the skylight."

"You won't get stewed on his whisky, my lad."

"The hell you say! If I could get into the hold I know how to get into the lazaret."

"Fat chance of openin' a hatch! The hatches was put on proper. Has to be with a cargo o' naptha. Even the ventilators is covered with brass gauze. Besides, it's dark as hell down there. Strike a match and up we bloody well goes!"

"I got one o' them 'lectric torches. Swiped it from the chartroom, I did. Wot about it, Slimmy? You wot knows the way to the whisky?"

Slimmy answered by opening the lee door. He peered aft. The second mate drowsed in the lee of the dodger, dry and comfortable, lulled by the rhythmic sway of the ship, every part of him except the top of his sou'wester sheltered from the wind.

"Gimme the torch!" said Slimmy. "One o' you lend a hand to cut the gauze from the booby hatch ventilator. It's turned to loo'ard. Second mate's up to windward. He won't see nothing. Heavy-eyed bag o' tripe!"

Men kept watch. Mr. Jones never moved. Slimmy and his helper ripped the gauze from the rim of the cowl, and still Mr. Jones did not move. They dropped the gauze down the wide ventilator pipe, and Slimmy climbed in after it, a rope hitched around the pipe giving him something to lower himself by.

"Hell! I dropped the torch!" he said. "I'll find it at the bottom. It don't smell bad. Lot o' fuss over gas. That's to make blokes careful, likely. Stand by behind the ventilator, chum. When I give the word haul up."

"Don't you go strikin' no matches, Slimmy!"

"Not if I find the torch. Look out for Jones. Them sleepy fat blokes wakes up astonishin' sometimes."

Slimmy vanished. Mr. Jones raised his head to glance around, felt a splash of salt water on his face, and snuggled down again with a sigh of bliss. Daylight was not far off.

Mr. Jones woke up. The wind had roared, but it was no roaring wind that awoke him. A flame shot to leeward from the booby hatch ventilator; then the booby hatch rose upon a billow of smoke and went away over the side like a giant bat. The ship shuddered. There was a hollow explosion like that of a ton of loose gunpowder set alight; flames leaped aloft just abaft the mainmast past the lowermast head. Captain Bruce was on deck before the report died away; but he was no quicker than Mr. Hopkins.

Beyond that curtain of flame was the galley, and from it pealed the shouts of terrified men. Bruce's keen eyes took in the grim situation swiftly.

"My God! Both boats are blazing already!" he said. Mr. Hopkins had no criticism to make now. It was a crisis

calling for cooperation and seamanship, new or old. The flames blew to leeward, filling the lee deck; they roared through the burst hatch and eddied across the windward side with a ferocity no man dare face. Some tried it, frantic to reach the poop, and had been beaten back.

"What's the fool after? Gone crazy as a squirrel!" cried Mr. Hopkins. There was Bruce, running aloft on the mizzen like a skylarking boy.

"Too hot for him down here!" Hopkins muttered, then turned savagely upon Jones, whose fat face streamed with sweat of terror.

"Hop to it, my lad! Only one thing to do. Get some o' them planks up from the maindeck. A raft. The ship's finished. Get a raft in the water and the men must jump. Some of 'em may reach it. Glory! Look at them flames!"

DODGING, ducking, fearful only of the fierce heat and now indifferent to the gale, the two mates leaped up and down the ladder to windward with ropes, and together hauled to the poop the heavy pine planks still lying where the sea had last strewn them. The steward lent feeble aid, until Mr. Hopkins sent him below to collect stores. Jones caught a glimpse of the roaring sea and shuddered.

"A raft 'll live about two minutes in that!" he moaned. But Mr. Hopkins had glanced aloft. Jones followed his gaze. Bruce's tiny figure, vividly outlined in the glare, had reached the mizzen truck. Now it was sliding down the mizzen royal stay to the main lowermast head. There the fire had already begun to strip the paint; the saturated canvas of the mainsail was smoldering as it dried; a tongue of fire played along the leech of the goose-winged main topsail. Fire ran up the ropes like corposants.

Up again went Bruce, clear to the main truck, and he dragged with him a wire, his broken aerial. Then, to reach the poop again he must descend to the mizzen royal stay, and swarm up it again to come flashing down by the backstay. His eyebrows were gone, his smart clothes hung in smoking rags, but he smiled crookedly.

"Splendid," he said. "Good men. Carry on. Get all the planks you can reach." Then he ran into the chartroom and sat at his radio key. He was impatient. He tapped, but ever his face turned to the porthole and the swiftly growing fire.

Suddenly he uttered a sound which might have been a moan of despair in another man, tapped frantically, and at last flung down the phones and ran outside to look aloft. A streak of fire curled around the main rigging. It reached the truck. The aerial came snaking down again. The main topsail was ablaze, the ship was laboring in the trough of the sea, out of control.

"Mr. Hopkins," he said sharply, "I shall give you no orders. You're a better man than I for the job you're doing. Carry on. If she comes up head to wind she'll go in a minute. Then heave the planks overboard and let every man look to himself."

He wrapped his tattered coat about his head and darted through the eddying flames along the windward side; then Mr. Hopkins lost sight of him beyond the smoke.

"Come on, haul planks!" he snarled.

Twelve of the heavy pieces of timber lay on the poop. Already it was too hot to remain at the fore end. The mates slashed at running rigging for rope. The sea began to rear up and crash aboard to windward. A burning boat collapsed, and then the boat gallows went up in a chaos of charred wood and twisted iron.

Something was happening forward, though. There was a rattle of blocks, a thunderous volley of canvas, shrill cries. The foretopmast staysail was going up. Then the inner jib. Mr. Hopkins needed no orders, he ran to the wheel, cast off the pretty gadget, and spun the wheel hard up. Next a shout

came from aloft on the foremast. Another, heavier thunder of canvas.

"He's setting the fore topsail! But the braces won't stand, Jones, the fire—"

He ceased, gave his attention to the helm; he remembered the braces were wire, a piece of economy on the late owner's part which he had often condemned. Moreover, he found it hard to find words to fit Captain Bruce now. The man had ideas, far removed from the old ideas, but they worked—as the wheel gadget had worked.

The ship paid off, and began to run before the wind. But now the flames, intensifying every minute, raged along the fore part of the ship. The fire, starting at the after end of the hold, had burst through the bulkhead.

MR. HOPKINS shook his head gloomily. Those men forward were trapped. Now and then between the flames he could see them darting about in panic. He heard Bruce's voice; sharp and commanding, but cool and encouraging. What could he do? Mr. Hopkins could give credit to a brave man even if he disliked him, but now Bruce's courageous attempt had only prolonged the ship's life for a few minutes at the cost of a dozen lives.

"Oh well," he muttered, "it's only getting them out of their misery quicker!"

"Hopkins!"

That shout came from forward, from Bruce.

"Stand by on the lee side with lines! Keep your eyes open!"

Mr. Jones obeyed the order, for Hopkins dared not quit the helm. The ship washed slowly forward under her ribbon of sail, the topsail was already bone dry and smoking. Neither mate knew what to look for. There was no more shouting—until Mr. Jones gave a yell and flung himself over the rail in the bight of his rope to reach into the sea.

A half drowned seaman was hauled on board, a stout line about his body. He coughed water, panted for breath, and gasped out:

"Cap'n says make this line fast, and stand by!"

Against the lee side of the sluggishly moving hull the surge rose and fell unbroken. Quickly another man appeared, dragging himself along with a snatch-block on the line to keep him from being swept away. Then fast on each other's heels came the rest of the crew; and last of all, Captain Bruce.

It was daylight now. The sea rolled tremendously under a lightening but still angry sky. Bruce no longer looked smart; he was less of a ragbag than the mate, but only because he had less rags left. He doubled up in distress, but his eyes missed nothing. He shook his head at the sea, and tottered uncertainly towards Hopkins at the wheel.

"Not much hope, Hopkins. How long would a raft live in this? How long would men stay on it? They are all here except one. Couldn't find the chap they call Slimmy. Can you suggest anything?"

Mr. Hopkins jerked his head.

"I knew a raft wouldn't live, or men stay on it, sir. There's my idea—not much, but all I can think of."

Out from the stern, over the gunwale and under the steering gratings, projected four stout planks, and another lay across them near the rail.

"Soon it'll be too hot to stay even here," Hopkins explained. "Lay the other planks athwart, the men can lay out on 'em and lash 'em together. If nothing comes of that radio you was sending, we must take a chance that they'll float us long enough to say our prayers."

Bruce knew how slight was the hope held out, for he had been able to give only an approximate position, even that had been questioned, and before he had been able to repeat it the aerial was burned away. But in putting the ship before the wind he knew he was heading towards the *Presidio's* course, and all

they could do now was to steer her and hope the forward canvas held.

The men crawled out upon the planks; as far out as they could get. They began to build a raft, but it gave them little comfort. The foretopsail went in smoke and flame; the yards had started to fall from the mainmast; with her square canvas gone the old *Star of Anchuria* scarcely moved.

The fire crept aft. The fore end of the poop was ablaze; the saloon skylight burst, and a tongue of fire flashed up. A man might remain at the wheel for five minutes, no more.

The steward opened a bag of biscuit and a jar of water. Mr. Hopkins dared the flames to snatch two buckets from the poop rack, and while some of the men ate the rest drew water from the sea and hurled it over whoever held the heated wheel. Then the maintopmast fell afoul of the foremast, a flaming torch, and set it alight from top to truck.

The staysail vanished in a whirl of fire, the jib sheet parted; the ship lay wallowing. Now the fire shot in all directions as she swung. And as the pallid sun broke through, the wind fell, the sea began to subside, the fire and smoke rose in a lurid column to the zenith.

"Leave the wheel, Mr. Hopkins. The gratings have caught, the ship has lost way. We can do no more. Keep water going over the men. It'll be a desperate chance if we have to trust to the planks."

BRUCE remained nearest the heat. Mr. Hopkins squatted near him. He knew, perhaps better than Bruce, how slim would be their chance of being seen by any passing ship once they cast that frail raft adrift and floated at sea level. He glanced at the captain. There was little of the liner commander about that burned, singed scarecrow. And Bruce looked furtively at his mate, finding little to remind him of the disgruntled seaman he had called a ragbag. Hopkins was ragged, he was as burned and blackened as Bruce, but something identified him as infinitely more than a ragbag, however dressed.

One side of the grating burst loose, burned through, and the raft tipped crazily. Now the men clung to it like flies on a wall. It was too late to cast it adrift. They must hang on until it fell. And the men with the buckets gave up hauling water to hold themselves on. Bruce and Hopkins took the buckets. Jones had seized one, but the mate took it from him as if in jealousy, and water flew again. Men looked fearfully for the lifting of the rest of the grating, hoping for it, dreading the moment.

A spear of flame touched Bruce, and he drew back. He could go no farther; the men were at the plank ends.

"We've done our best," he said quietly. "Cut loose the planks. One man one plank. It won't be for long, I'm afraid."

"Never say die, sir," Hopkins said hoarsely. "Your radio call—"

"Little hope of that bringing help. It was picked up, but our position was not understood. The aerial carried away before I could repeat. Get the men away on their planks."

Bruce went on the last plank. Before he took the plunge he tried to pierce the pall of greasy smoke and view the ocean. There was nothing.

"Come on, sir!" shouted Mr. Hopkins from his plank. "She's red-hot already! Even the water's hot!"

Bruce could believe that. Clouds of steam surrounded the ship besides the smoke. The subsiding sea still rolled in steep swells, the planks drifted apart. The faces of the men looked like theater masks, terror-lit with fire. Bruce shook his head sadly, and dropped into the sea.

The ship, deeper in the water than the planks, slowly drifted away. Hopkins had not exaggerated; the sea was warm, but it cooled as the distance increased. There was no use looking for help. A man's horizon from a floating plank was

only a matter of yards. One by one men lost sight of each other, calling for a while in desperate loneliness. Bruce swam his plank nearer to Mr. Hopkins, but had not spoken when one of the men began to scream. He cursed Slimmy, who had caused the fire; he cursed the throat of the man who wanted whisky.

"That bit of news won't do us much good, sir!" Hopkins called out. Bruce shook his head. Now it was only when a plank rose on a swell that a man could see his fellows, and the sun grew hot. A man let go his plank, flung up his hands, and sank. Bruce and Hopkins reached him together, dragged him across the plank and lashed him there with their belts. But their eyes met, and they knew it was no kindness they did him. Mr. Jones lay face down across his float, gurgling, believing it best, for he had passed beyond feeling or caring.

The ship had drifted away now, taking her heat and steam and smoke. The sea was leveller. The hissing of water against red-hot iron filled the air with a curiously lulling sound. Then abruptly the sound had a different note. Bruce raised his head and listened, his look incredulous. Then Hopkins heard it. A whooping, devilishly jocular sort of sound, rising to a shriek.

"If that sound is real, it's the *Presidio!* I fitted that siren myself!" shouted Bruce then laughed, unbelieving.

But there were voices. Slowly a great liner moved from beyond the smoke; faster, nearer, a motor lifeboat approached the strewn planks. Bruce hailed now. Called the officer by name.

"Hullo, Baines!"

A closer stare, then the officer shouted:

"Great guns! It's Captain Bruce! Enjoying your busman's holiday, sir? Bear a hand, boys!"

ON board the liner Captain Bruce's temporary successor was explaining that the imperfectly understood radio message had at least caused him to turn aside from his course in hope of finding the *Star of Anchuria,* but only the great pillar of fire, seen for forty miles, had enabled him to find her.

And Captain Bruce had explained that nothing but Mr. Hopkins' idea of building that platform had saved their lives.

"Queer old fellow," Bruce said. "Fine seaman, full of resource, but I'm afraid he's too old to learn new tricks. A pity. I'd like to do something for him, but the life he's known has passed. He'll never change. He despises everything new. It's too bad."

In a roomy, tidy cabin Mr. Hopkins, freshly bathed, his hurts newly dressed, regarded dubiously the heap of garments laid out on the bed by the liner's chief officer.

"They'll fit you, I guess," the chief officer said. "If you want anything else, ring for the steward. You must have smelled hell out there. Take it easy now."

Half an hour later a bellboy entered.

"Captain Bruce's compliments, sir, and would you see him in the commander's day room at your convenience."

The urchin stood in the doorway, smart and respectful. Slowly a twinkle crept into his eyes. Mr. Hopkins looked striking, with strips of plaster on his red face; he was redder than was natural, for he tugged manfully at the ends of a refractory collar, the ends of a black silk tie lay over his shoulder. He had on a pair of shining black shoes, and as he struggled with the collar he rubbed first one shoe and then the other against the back of his calves. They shone like glass. He caught the twinkle in the boy's eyes, and turned redder.

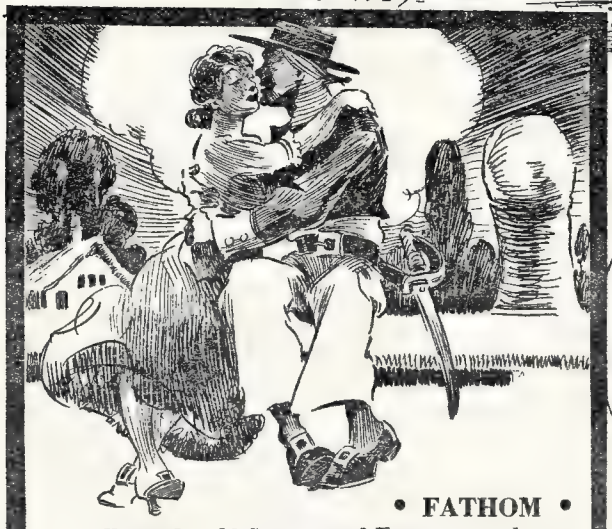
"My son," Mr. Hopkins said solemnly, "if you'll lend me a hand to toggle this collar before I get it all smudged up to hellangone, I'll be obliged. Then take my compliments to Captain Bruce, and say the ragbag will be at his service in a brace of shakes."

TRADITIONS OF THE DEEPWATERMEN

by WINDAS

• EXECUTION DOCK •

Near Blackwell on the Thames, where pirates and mutineers were hanged, the name is now a sailorman's general term for any jail, anywhere, where criminals are dispatched.



• FATHOM •

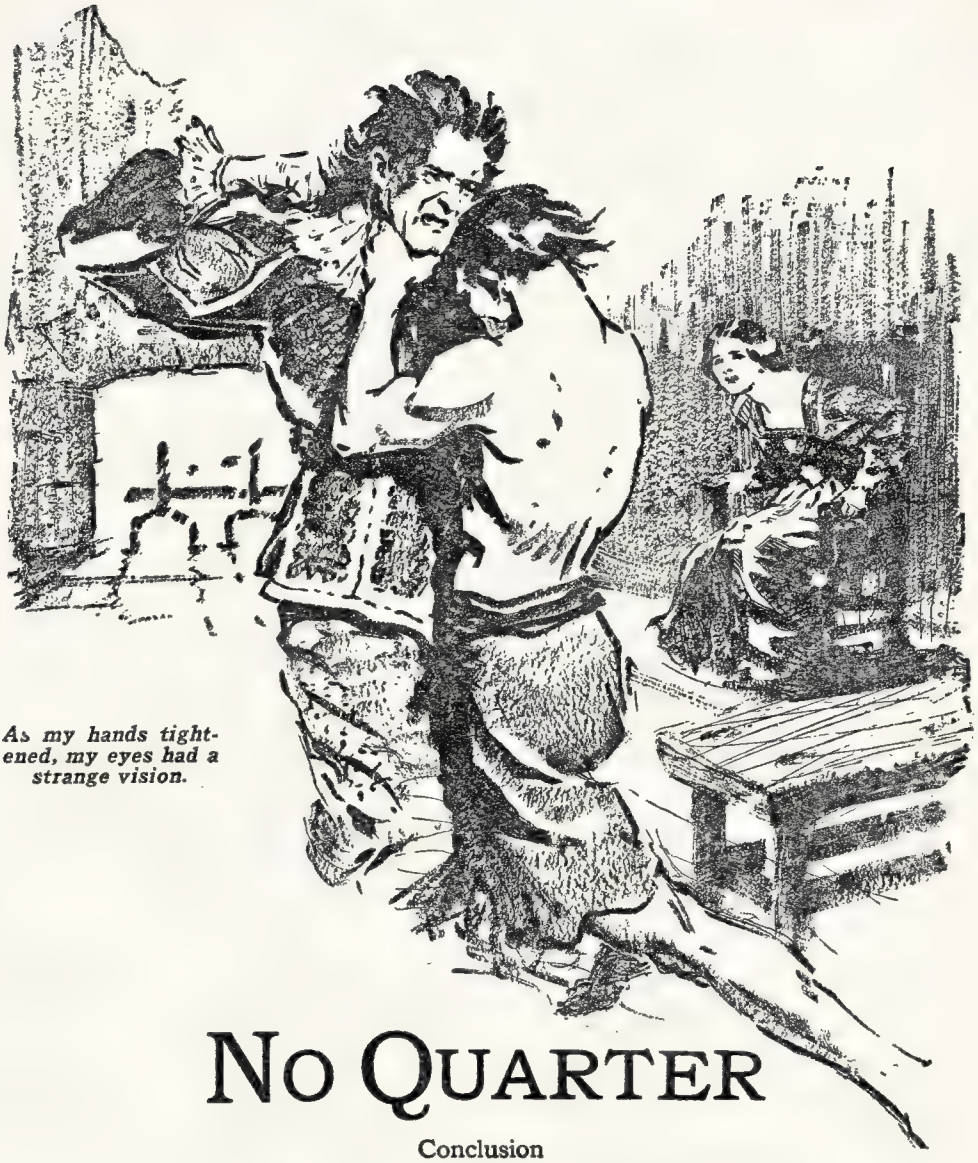
From the old Saxon word Faetm, to embrace. Parliament ruled that in an embrace a man's arms extended approximately seventy-two inches, so the word became a synonym for any six-foot measure.

• BLOODY •

This meaningless expletive was originally a devout expression, "By our Lady", but when North country seamen began using it as an oath, their burring accent pronounced it "B'oor Luddy" until finally it reached its present "Bloody".

• TOP-GALLANT •

The T'gallan' mast and T'gallan' sail of modern ships received their name from a ring of rope near the tops of Roman ship masts. The ring was called a Garland.



As my hands tightened, my eyes had a strange vision.

No Quarter

Conclusion

By MAURICE WALSH

IT WAS the second day after the sack of Aberdeen, and our Highlanders and Irishmen were in a vengeful mood. Our Captain General the Marquis of Montrose had told us to do with the city as we willed, and it was no safe place for a Covenant man this day.

I went down there with my foster brother, Tadg Mor O'Kavanagh, to find a spot of fun or trouble. As it happened we found both. For outside the kirk we came upon the public stocks, and a woman ankle-locked there for the world to scorn. Margaret Anderson, her name was, and she was being punished, Covenant fashion, for not coming to listen to the minister's sermons—nor heeding his courtship.

We knew how to handle that little matter. We tied the minister to the stocks and the girl came back to camp with us, for there would be no more safety for her in that city, once our army had moved on.

It took us nigh ten months to fight through to Lochloy, where her nearest kin lived, and by that time she had made a place for herself in the regiment and was like to remain.

And later, in the lands of one Rose of Belivat, we ran into more trouble with a woman. She was a hostage in Belivat Castle, held for one Walter Dunbar, who would wed her. Iseabal Rose, her name was, and she had a mind of her own. So she came back to camp with us also.

Just about then we caught up with the Covenant Highlanders and we had our hands full for fair. The world knows about the battle of Aldearn. I will only say that we fought against a pretty army, and when the Gordons broke at the east wall, death stared waiting for us all. But the Huntly Horse broke through and held, and the bloody banner of the MacRaes went down forever.

Now in the armies of Montrose, women played an important part. They did the nursing and they were braver in battle than many a man. So when Dunbar came into camp to claim Iseabal Rose, we defied him. Indeed we were to do a lot of fighting for that strangely assorted pair.

Scarcely had our wounds healed after Aldearn when I learned that Margaret had been captured and imprisoned in Spynie Castle.

It was a mighty fortress. Montrose had refused to attack it in battle. It had a full garrison, and it was in the heart of the enemy country, but Tadg Mor made me see the light. We had brought the girl to our army, and we were hostage for her safety.

There was only one thing to do. We had three days to rescue her, and we had to do it alone.

As it happened, we ran into rare luck. A Gordon boy guided us through the bad lands, and we caught Brodie, the Spynie leader and forced the garrison to give Margaret up in exchange. It was a miracle—too good to last.

I come now to the bitter part of my story, and it will not take long. In the deadly drive to Methven, a party of foraging women were set upon by an outriding body of Balcarres' ruthless horse. There were exactly two and forty women in that party, and only six escaped death. Margaret died with them. She had held her life against death with her two strong hands until we came, to say good-by, and listen to our vengeance oath.

We found that vengeance at Kilsyth, on Lady Day in August. I will tell none of that, for I am sated with slaughter. Let it suffice to say that we exacted terrible victory—victory which was dust in our mouths.

And on a day in October of that year, Montrose came to say farewell. It had been a good year. Ten months before we had been a ragged band in imminent danger of throat cutting, and we had made that year the compass-time of a legend that would go down through all the years. We would make another year like it—some time.

But now, scattered after a disastrous battle at Philipaugh, it was time to run for cover. Montrose bade us God-speed and rode away, and we stood and watched him till the curving road hid his gallant little band from our eyes—forever.

CHAPTER X

(CONTINUED)

"WE have a long road before us," said Ranald Ban, to make talk, "but we have no baggage to hinder us, and not an ounce of plunder for our year's work—as the

Appin man said that went to Edinburgh to learn the ministry. Let me see now. We will keep well north of Loch Awe and the flanks of Cruachan, for the last time we were there we did not leave the MacNaughtons as much as the milk of a cow.

"Our best road will be across Rannock into Appin and over the sea to Mull, where we will stay awhile, and as long as we can keep you, with my father Ailin, and then down by the sound of Jura to hunt Alasdair."

"I would like surely to meet the father you are always talking about," said Tadg Mor. "There is a thing or two I would like to tell him."

"And one or two you will not tell him."

"I mind the day well," said Tadg Mor ruminatively, "and you coming out of a tavern-house in Aberdeen, a girl in one arm and a keg of ale in the other."

"You are wearing that keg on your shoulders this minute," said Ranald Ban. "It was the girl I wanted to part with, and I often wonder since how you persuaded me to give the keg to a shipman for his leather coat—against his will."

I left them bantering each other, and walked up by the course of the stream, and out into the heather. I stopped at the head of a lift of ground and looked around me over that very desolate country.

The purple of the heather was past its glory, and all the hills were gray and solemn; in the lifting swell of the great mountains northwards lonely patches of snow were unhumanly white in the folds of the chorries.

Below me the river ran clear and fast over limestone boulders, and its sough came up to me as coldly aloof and lonely as the whisper of the wind in the dry blossoms of the heather. And it was then that a most devastating loneliness came over me in that austere, desolate land, and I wanted to cower and hide and die like a wounded badger in his den.

I lay down in the heather and sank my head amongst the stems, and the waves flowed over me like the wind that made the heather stir.

I was only a small lonely futile speck in this wide cold lifting land; but, small and futile though I was, that land was drawing its net closer and closer round me.

Soon now it would be mouthing my bare bones amongst all the bare bones it loved to mouth. Montrose was gone, O'Cahan was dead; all the gay rough gallant men of the regiment were dead too; and all our poor faithful women scattered on the hills and dying, dying, dying.

And Margaret Anderson! I would never see her again, never hear her high clear voice toning itself queer and softly to the depth of the Gaelic. Her lustrous eyes, her wide clean mouth, the hollows of her long neck were filled with dust, and life was dust in my mouth. Better for me to die too, and be at the end of all struggle.

I had only to hold my breath for a little while and my lonely soul would slip away from its useless body. I knew then that many men had died as I was ready to die in that pit: by willing it. I was in that very bottom slough of life where the terrible sin of Despair lurks to destroy the souls of men. And I did not know that if I moved at all I would have to move upwards.

I do believe that I would have died there in the wilderness if Tadg Mor and Ranald Ban had not come up through the heather and sat down at my side. Tadg Mor placed his hand gently on my shoulder and said nothing, but Ranald bent close and comforted me, as only he could.

"It will be all right, Maurteen. Fight it out. Men get taken that way before the road turns. I know. I spent two nights in the heather above Fordoun

and the waves flowed cold over me."

After that Tadg Mor and he talked quietly together, giving me time to draw myself away from the abyss, and my foster brother brought the talk round cunningly to the days of our youth below the Walsh Mountains. He told of a race to the top of Mount Leinster and back again, and how I won it against all Slaneyside; and Ranald Ban capped it with the story of a great race that he had once ran round the full circuit of Ben More in Mull.

"I would have won it too," said he with regret, "only four MacLeans and two of the MacBeths, and three MacDonalds and a young brother of mine got in ahead of me."

"How many were behind you?" Tadg Mor wanted to know.

"I had the whole place to myself," said Ranald boastingly.

And as Tadg Mor laughed, Ranald Ban came to his knees at my side, and a fresh interest came into his voice.

"Talking of races, here comes a man in a race of his own, and he making his last bid for the post."

I lifted my head and sat up. The famous droving road that comes over the height of land between Spey and Tay ran and looped below us by the Garry. A man was running doggedly on that track. He was not making much speed—just a bare jog—but it was his best. One arm was across his breast, the other helping to lift his weary feet; and his head was thrown back and sunk between his shoulders, like a man in a final effort for the winning post, as Ranald Ban had said. He swayed as he ran, stumbled once, shook his ragged head, and went on again.

He saw us on the head of the slope as the track swerved towards us, lurched, checked himself, and set a foot in the heather to come to us. But he shook his head against the steepness, and beckoned us wearily to come to him. And Tadg Mor swore mightily and leaped.

"*Tigearne!* It is Black Rab Fraser himself."

It was Black Rab Fraser, the servant of Iseabal Rose, who, in her quiet and steadfast way, had set her foot on a road that turned away from mine, and the thought of whom I had put out of my mind for my own peace.

The road had turned.

WE ran down to Black Rab, and Tadg Mor put a supporting arm round him.

"I found ye," said Black Rab, and there was a pride in his panting hoarseness.

"The race is over and you the winner," said Tadg Mor. He looked fiercely up the valley, and his hand came to his hilt. "Was it Hugh Rose or Wat Dunbar was after you?"

"They were at the beginning of it whatever. Hae ye a bite among ye?"

"Not your size, but we will be seeing."

Whilst Tadg Mor supported him down the track, Ranald Ban and I ran ahead to where the camp-fire was dying down in ashes. I built it up and set it flaming with dry heath stems; Ranald Ban cut thin slices off a haunch of venison, and we had two of them toasting on forked sticks before Rab staggered in on Tadg Mor's arm and sank down in the heather.

Ranald Ban looked at me meaningly. "He was looking for us."

"He had his own reasons—or another's," I answered. "We will hear."

The man was nearly done, his cheeks hollow, his eyes bloodshot, his mouth loose. There was a bloody bandage on his head and another on his left arm, and one of his feet was bare and bleeding.

Tadg Mor held a firm knee against him, and felt in the pocket of the leather coat.

"A case of need, anyway." He brought forth our own special flask of uisge-

baugh. We always carried an emergency one of the purest triple-run spirit for purposes of medicine and surgery. Now he allowed Rab one deep gurgling gulp, and drew the bottle away against the spent man's holding hand. That powerful spirit went through his veins almost visibly, and his back stiffened even as he cleared his throat.

"I'm a' right," growled the indomitable fellow. "There's nothing wrong wi' me—only the hunger."

"We will put that wrong right for you." Tadg Mor patted his shoulder.

"Nothing other than cold water crossed my lips since night before last. I'll have that one now." He leaned forward, snapped a slice of meat out of the flame, and stuffed his mouth full with it.

"If it sticks in your gullet," warned Ranald Ban, "your stomach will never forgive you."

Rab gulped and swallowed, and beckoned for another piece.

"Take it easy, Rabeen," advised Tadg Mor.

"Four days I am on the road—or is it fiye?—but I aye knew I'd find ye. A strange thing—the second sight was given me two nights ago—my mother had it afore me—and I saw ye, the three o' ye together the same as always, and ye lying round a camp-fire in a place like this; and Tadg Mor was crying to himself in his sleep."

"It was the second sight," said Tadg Mor quietly. "A dream I had. Go on, Rab!"

"Before that I had a mind to turn east to A'anside and across to Dee, but the vision I had told me to keep south by Spey and ower the pass. And here I am."

He looked at me then, not at Ranald Ban.

"Wat Dunbar has taken your *Roisin Dhuv*."

"There spoke his death sentence, as God is my judge," said Ranald Ban fiercely.

"Wait—wait!" I stopped him impatiently. "We must get at this from the beginning. Let him eat first. Here is another slice, Black Rab."

He tore at the half-cooked venison with his white hound's teeth and in a grim silence we watched him finish three pieces. And Tadg Mor gave him a little more spirits mixed with water.

"You will get your fill of meat when your tale is told," said Tadg Mor. "Our *Roisin Dhuv*? Go on, Rab!"

"Wat Dunbar has Mistress Iseabal hidden away," said he.

"Is she his wife?" I put to him.

"Na—as far as I know. It will be worse than that, I'm feart."

Ranald Ban sprang to his feet and sat down again, taking strong hold of himself.

"Tell us from the beginning," he ordered harshly, "from the time I left her in Aberdeen."

"Ay will I! We werena a se'nnight in her uncle's house. Maybe he wrote—I couldna be knowin' that—but Hugheon Rose came in himself with four men and took her back to Fleenas. She went quiet with him—what else—and he was quiet too, like a sarpent. I followed to Fleenas, feart as I was, but he was quiet wi' me as well, and didna lift as much as his bare hand to me."

"He did not put her in the bell-tower?"

"No need, an' Wat Dunbar away."

"But Dunbar returned?"

"So he did. But he wasna welcome any longer. Wait till ye hear. Ye ken how bonny she was—ye saw the bonniness grow on her like the rose her name. Well, then, ae day the auld Black Rose of Kilravock—her own blood, an uncle far out, and a man respectit—he came over to Fleenas to pree for the Covenant into her father's jaunt wi' Montrose. He didna get much out o' Hugheon Rose, but Kilravock's son Iain was with him—a fine tall lad, and fair like his mother's people—and when he saw our Iseabal

his heart leaped out o' his mouth, and his twa eyes said as plain as words, 'Ye are the lass for me.'

"And to make my story short, he said the same thing wi' his tongue in no time at all. And there it was. The auld folk were pleased fine and why not they? Even if there was a word or two going the rounds about her riding off behind a black Irish devil—begging his pardon.

"The minister, John Balfour, put his thumb on that from the pulpit itself. She was a beauty, I'm tellin' ye, and fit for a king's bed, and Kilravock the strongest family in all Strathnairn, and well able to restore the Belivat name and lands. Ay! the auld folk were fine pleased."

"And Iseabal?"

"SHE said nothing, one way or another. She was sad and quiet in her ways—quieter than ever she was, but she was aye that since Alford. I said to her ae time:

" 'Will we run for it again, *Roisin Dhuv*—you know where?' But she shook her head and shook it again.

" 'Nowhere,' says she. 'That road is ended. If I am to be sold, Rab, the bad bargain may as well stay in the family.' And then she took haud o' me and cried. Ay, she cried here on my shoulder. And I grat too. And so the match was made atween the cousins."

"And Walter Dunbar came home?"

"An' got the sour welcome, as I said. The sourness of it was plain as the day, and the reason for't. Moyness is only a small place by Kilravock, and young Iain Rose had no bad name to put ahind him. And if Wat Dunbar had a bad name he soon showed how well he deserved it. He said never a word, mind ye, even when sly tongues paired him wi' a piece on a checkerboard, but he up and acted like a king in his own right.

"Look now! Wan dark o' night, a fortnight ago, he came doon on Fleenas wi' his twenty men—ye ken the kind o' them—burned the steading to the ground, killed Hugheon Rose and five o' his men—I'm tellin' ye—killed Hugheon Rose dead, I saw him do it—and whippit off Mistress Iseabal without leave or license."

"To Moyness?"

"No' him. Kilravock would root him out o' Moyness or the day was out."

"Where then?"

"Where? There's my trouble, but dinna blame me. I got the head and arm ye see on me fighting outside her door, and was lying for dead in my blood, when they hailed her off. I got twa o' the bloody rogues a' the same. As soon as I got my senses again I made Kilravock wi' a struggle, an' for three days we scoured the country. Wat had hidden her awa', and there are many hidie holes up and down Findhornside. It would take a lone man a year to pree into them all."

"Not alone."

"Yes—then. After three days Kilravock needed help himself. Lord Lewis Gordon, up from the killing in the Lowlands, made a drive into Moray and Nairn, burned out Brodie once again and made a ring round Lethen and Kilravock. I was fair desperate by that time, and I went across to see the minister John Balfour, who was the only man in Ardclach no' afraid o' the Dunbars.

"It was he reminded me o' ye and what ye did for the Aberdeen lass. I wasna there when ye got back from Spynie, but all Moray was talking o' the daring and terrorsome deed. Is it true that ye cut off one o' Brodie's ears to remind him no' to listen to ill tongues, and left Kinnaird—worse off?"

"I knew fine," said Tadg Mor regretfully, "that we left something undone that time."

"No harm if ye did it, whatever. Weel sirs, when the minister reminded me, I says to myself, 'If they did a' that for

an Aberdeen fishertoon lass what'll they no' do for a lady wi' the Gaelic tongue and the Gaelic blood and bonny besides?' And to the minister I says:

" 'Whaur will I find them in a' the low Lowlands?'

" 'It will be a long road indeed,' says he, 'for you and them, and a forlorn task at the end o' it, but we will go down to shipmaster Alick Anderson of Lochloy and he may have word to shorten your road.'

"So down we went, but he had no word."

"Did he know that Margaret Anderson was dead?" I asked.

"He knew and was sair hurt. One of the Gordons brought him word." He looked at me underbrowed. "My mistress had a great respect for that tall fair one, though she mightna show it, an' I likit her weel. She fed me three days in Auldearn. I am sorry, master."

"Go on with your story."

"He had no word of ye, though the news of the loss of Philiphaugh was a week old.

" 'If they are no' dead,' says he, 'and dead they well might be, they will be back ower the Highland line, this side o' Perth, or at the headwaters of Dee.'

" 'Will they come to the help o' my mistress, thing you?' I said, doubtful kind."

" 'Did you never hear o' Spynie Tower?' says he, upbraiding me.

" 'I did,' says I, 'an if they do likewise by Wat Dunbar I will be well pleased.' "

" 'They will come,' says he bold. 'I saw Iseabal Rose at Alford an' she put her mind to my trouble, and there were three men wi' her who will come to her in her need unless the clay of Philiphaugh covers them, and the clay will have to be deep," says he, 'and heavy to haud the iron of them down. Go you, black lad, and when you find them bring them here to me at Lochloy, for John Balfour and myself might know where to direct their swords by that time.'

"So I buckled my ain sword—and that minds me I hid it in the heather back the glen a piece, for the weight o't weighed me down and I near spent. Ah weel! Here I am now in your hands, and a' my tale done."

"AND cunning done, Black Rab Fraser," praised Tadg Mor, "and we always thinking you had no tongue in your head."

I looked at Ranald Ban, and waited for him to speak, but Ranald Ban looked at me and waited too. I was strangely torn at that moment, and knew a fear that was not my own.

"I am afraid, Ranald Ban," I cried, some restraint slipping in me. "Women have been unlucky in our hands—in my hands. Margaret Anderson is dead, and will Iseabal Rose die too?"

"If it is her fate, and it might be my hand that will kill her for her own sake."

"But look! Have you noted how Margaret and Iseabal were treading equal roads, linked strangely though apart? A strange thing. We took one out of the stocks and out of prison, but we could not hold her from death. Tadg Mor, the Lord Death was too strong for us."

"I will know that, brother," said Tadg Mor, "when death has dealt with me."

"In turn," I hurried on," we took Iseabal Rose out of prison, and it may well be that we will wrest her out of Dunbar's hands too. Will death take her then, even by your sword, or will the road turn and she know happiness in your Mull of the Mountains? I am afraid, I tell you. We are only rescuers of ladies once and twice, for death to take them the third time."

"The road will turn," said Ranald Ban steadily against my wildness, "but it will not lead to any Mull of mine. I know that. I knew it the second night I spent

in the heather above Fordoun. I had my vision too. There is only one man for her."

"That man will be John Balfour the minister, then," said I.

"Have it your own way," said Ranald Ban, looking at me strangely. "But no matter where her heart is, it will be my pleasure to kill Walter Dunbar." He touched the hilt of his sword. "And after that this sword, if she asks for it, will do what it never did before in the hands of a MacKinnon: pierce a woman through her heart. She would n'er shamed."

I had a clear vision then of Iseabal Rose weeping as she had never wept, even on Black Rab's shoulder, her lovely dark eyes tragic below the tears, and the quiet beauty of her face all broken. I jumped to my feet.

"It could never be," I cried to the dumb sky. "God would not let her be shamed."

"I will remind you," said Ranald Ban bitterly, "that the God that is preached in this land of Scotland is a chancy man."

I flung my hand towards the desolation of the mountains.

"What can we do—four men lost in this wild land?"

Tadg Mor was on his feet, his hands firming on my twisting shoulders.

"Easy, little brother! Easy. The thing we will do first is to go down to Alick Anderson at Lochloy. That is what we can do. Black Rab had his vision for some reason."

His strong hands and his steadfast mind coming through them soothed me.

"We will do that," said I, and I was quiet now.

Black Rab Fraser shouted with all his might.

"I never doubted ye once," he roared. "Gie me twa more skelbs o' meat and I'm ready for the road, and the Lord hae mercy on Wat Dunbar's soul as little as He can."

But the road had turned.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE ROAD

THE road we took twisted upwards of one hundred miles, and, besides twisting, many of the miles stood on their heads. We covered that road in three days, for we were the finest marchers in the world, and that is tall boasting. We could have done it in less, but we had to go easy the first day with Black Rab, and give him an hour or two of sleep in the bygoing. We fashioned a deer's-hide brogan for his bare foot, and I will say for him that, good hillmen as we were, he was as good as any of us the last day.

We had been over many parts of the road more than once in our great marches behind Seumas Graham, and these parts were mostly friendly. Up through Badenoch west of the snow-seamed scarred peaks of the Grampian Mountains we were in MacPherson country, and that clan, that had fought with us in six battles, cherished us nobly as we padded through, and even hindered us with their hospitality. By the borders of the wide forest of Abernethy, an old camping ground of ours, we swung away westwards to avoid the lands of Clan Grant. The Grants were always chancy—with us and against us.

We were in MacIntosh territory now, and there too we had to move carefully, for that branch of Clan Chattan, in between reiving times, might be friendly with the lairds of Nairn. But Black Rab knew the lie of the country hereabouts, and led us quiet roads, where we were able to venture a lucky shot at a hind for our evening meal. Both Ranald Ban and Tadg Mor carried flintlocks. At one point going down into the Streens of Findhorn we were actually within a few miles of Iseabal's prison place, if we only had known it.

We crossed the Findhorn at a ford that Black Rab called Polochaig, and

did not venture the last stretch until night came down.

"We might be safe enough with Lewie Gordon's men," said Black Rab, "but yon ahead of us is Cawdor land, and them crooked-mouths are the Campbell breed and used to slitting windpipes. The dark for us."

That last night, then, we went over the long tilt of the Cawdor moors, flanked the hill of Ord, and passed within a mile of our old battlefield of Aldearn. We came down on Maviston of Lochloy shortly after dawn. And a quiet mood was on us—as quiet and as cold as the new day.

The tide was in and a chill gray-green, but the hills of Ross across the firth had not changed from their blue and purple. The *Moray Quoins* was riding at anchor in her old place, and the reflection of her shook in the draw of the water. To my eye she was ready for sea, her cordage taut, and sails furled on all her yards. And I had a numb pain thinking of the one that was to have sailed in that boat in this month of October. And I shrank from facing her uncle.

The hamlet was still abed—or the men might be out fishing—but a wisp of smoke, blue in the grayness, lifted out of the chimney of Alick Anderson's two-storied thatched house. He was an early riser and opened the door for us himself.

It was less than four months since we had parted with him at the Ford of Gight on the Spey, but he had aged in that time and grown thinner. Still, the firm bones of him had not lost their strength, and his eyes could light up as they lit now. His hands welcomed us heartily.

"Come in—come awa' in," he cried. "I was looking for ye, but not for two days yet. Ye're a grand chiel, Black Rab Fraser."

He ushered us into the big room with its oaken furniture out of Edinburgh, and a new fire of peat was beginning to blaze on the wide hearth. He bade us sit and went to an inner door to tell his housekeeper to flay a puckle more speldings for breakfast.

I felt utterly forlorn where I stood by the fireside in that dark room that Margaret and Iseabal had once lit with their presence, and I did not know how to address the shipmaster. Neither did Ranald Ban nor Tadg Mor, who only cleared their throats and shuffled their feet. But Alick Anderson came to my side and placed his hand on my shoulder.

"I know, friend. I know it all. The lad of the Gordons you know—Myron was his name—rade down from Lethen to tell me. Dinna say a word. Montrose walked behind her at the head of his army, and ye three and a Colonel O'Cahan carried her on your shoulders. She was well loved."

"She was loved." I met his eye then. "She had no pain, and at the end she said, 'Tell my Uncle Alick all my happiness.' "

He looked at me close. "Did she say that—my lassie?"

"That is what she said."

"It has meaning to me. I am glad." He straightened up and struck his breast, his eyes kindling. "I am prood she was acquaint of men and that her death was gallant. In her need I called ye, doubt in my heart, and ye smiled and came with debonair, and did a deed o' hardihood that shook all Moray."

"We did not do all the things Moray said," hinted Tadg Mor.

"I know. Myron told me. Ye did nobly, and now, at the word, ye are here again two days before time at the end of a terrible campaign."

"We are here," said Ranald Ban, and then quickly. "You have news for us?"

"Little myself, but I will take ye to a man that will have it for us by the time we get there." He put the subject aside with his hands. "It can wait a meenit.

Ye'll brak fast wi' me first. Ye are meat-fed men, and I ask pardon for the poor fare I have for ye this morn."

HIS fare was not poor and, sitting to it, we found that we were hungry. Great platters of oatmeal parritch having the flavor of the live corn, piggins of new milk, oat and wheaten bannocks, fresh-salted butter that I had not tasted the like of since leaving Ireland, and for main dish a cured fish that he called spelding, which I think is a haddock lightly cured to an amber yellow over oaken shavings. Writing this, my mouth waters thinking of the flavor of it.

"My hand!" said Tadg Mor, "Meat and salmon are a coarse diet by these. No more, uncle Alick, if you want me to march this week—just that small one then, and God increase your store!"

Alick Anderson was busy about us and ate but little himself, and as we busied ourselves he talked to us.

"It is no easy or safe to get out and about Nairn the days that are in it, with the Gordons everywhere, and the Grants and Toshes reivin' awa to themselves up-by on the borders. We did what we could, all the same, John Balfour and myself. There is one thing we know: Wat Dunbar came in to Lord Gordon's camp below the house of Lethen three days ago, and was received friendly like. As ye ken he was with the Gordons at Alford fight, and still pretends to be on the King's side—and he on his own side all the time. He promised Lord Lewie twenty men to help the siege."

"There would be only eighteen maybe," said Black Rab, "for I killed two myself."

"Maybe you did not kill them dead, Rabeen," said Tadg Mor. "Was it on the head you hit them?"

"I hit them where I could, an' if they live I will hit them again."

"Eighteen or twenty, it makes no matter," said Alick. "It is not likely that Lord Lewie will refuse their help to offer us his against their master. That is my one bit of bad news."

"Dod Myron will help us," said Tadg, "and one or two more if they are there."

"And I know two or three that will be with us," added Ranald Ban.

"I have four men o' the Roses where I can put my hand on them," said Black Rab, "and they will cut any throat I point out to them."

"Keep your finger pointing away from me, then," warned Tadg Mor.

"I have six Findhorn men in my crew," said Alick Anderson. "Hardy lads, trained to the boarding pike."

"Let us find where the lady is, first," I hinted.

"Find her we will, and that soon," said the shipmaster. "A man I had up there followed Dunbar out of the Gordon camp but lost him at the top end of Dulsie wood on the Findhorn. That way he rode and that way we are looking. And listen! John Balfour the minister sent me down word late last night. He is our man, and the man we are going to see. The message as it ran was this:

" 'I think I know. I will make sure tomorrow.'

"He couldna trust his messenger to say more. That is today. We will go up to Ardclach tonight."

"Why not now?" urged Ranald Ban.

"Because we have to move canny. Did any one speak ye on the road?"

"Not this side of Spey," Black Rab told him. "I made sure o' that."

"Dunbar has his spies abroad, and if he found out that ye three were north—" He clicked finger and thumb. "It might be ill for the lady and for us too. No. We will wait the gloaming and go round about, for Moyness lies ower near the straight road. Moreover, a rest will do ye good."

There was a pause then and Alick Anderson leaned his hands on the table and looked down at them.

"There's a thought has troubled me once or twice," said he slowly, as if speaking to himself. "What is to befall Iseabal Rose when we have her out?"

"Walter Dunbar will be dead," said Ranald Ban.

"And then?"

"There is her cousin," I hinted.

"Young Iain behind the walls of Kilravock! There is him surely." But he was not enthusiastic.

"I am thinking," said Tadg Mor, "that a lad of spirit would find a way from behind a wall to try what good a clout would do Wat Dunbar—or is it from Wat he is sheltering?"

"My very thought," said the shipmaster. He looked from Ranald Ban to me and back again. "Mind ye, gentlemen, the *Moray Quoine* is ready to lift anchor any tide, and I am ready as well to risk Leith Port and the plague of Edinburgh for Mistress Iseabal's sake." He paused and finished slowly. "And I am ready to take her any place else she wants to go."

Ranald Ban made no reply and I had none to make. Tadg Mor stepped into the breach.

"Let us not be bidding the devil good morrow till we meet him. *Roisin Duhv* has a tongue in her head."

We left it at that.

IT was close on midnight when we came to the manse-house in the hollow of Ardclach. We had come roundabout, across the Cawdor Road, through a small place called Urchany where a dog barked at us, and at last across a wide and treacherous moor with a stream to ford in the middle. The night was fine and clear, though without a moon, and Black Rab Fraser knew every inch of the road. The shipmaster had ridden pony back as far as the moor edge.

"There is no crossing this place in wet weather," he had told us.

In a dry October of a dry year it was bad enough in places, and we could feel the ground quake near the moss hags. Going down into the hollow of Ardclach we were amongst trees, and the fallen leaves rustled about our feet.

The shipmaster thought it prudent not to take us to the manse in a body. The small stone kirk stood apart from the township, and we climbed over the kirkyard wall, and made our way through the leaning headstones to the open porch of the kirk itself. Four of us waited in the deep shade in there, Tadg Mor making the sign of the cross as a safeguard against Protestant practices, while Alick Anderson went through the hand gate and up the path to the manse.

We stood silently and listened. The manse was just in front of us and not forty paces away, a narrow house of two stories every window dark. We heard the shipmaster's knock on the door, a diffident knock for a house asleep. It brought no answer, and he knocked louder this time. In a little while a window lifted and we could make out someone in white in the black square of it.

"Who is't?" A woman's voice, but not our woman.

Followed Alick's murmured answer, and the woman said, "Oh, it's you, shipmaster. I'll be doon in a minute."

"Auld Janet Calder, the housekeeper," Black Rab whispered to us.

In a minute, not more, the door opened and after a word or two Alick went into the house, and the door shut softly. No light was lit inside that we could see. We waited.

A cold air was blowing up the valley, and the dead leaves rustled and whispered amongst the headstones. Tadg Mor and I moved closer together, for, toughened night campaigners though we were, a small dread of ghostly things stayed with us from a ghost-ridden childhood in Ireland.

We sensed something unhuman in the

mutter of the dead leaves against the stones, like the muted whisper of stone mouths. When the breeze died down the muttering stopped, and the strong sough of the river came up to us from below. The Findhorn is the most rock-torn river in the north and the voice of it is never still—never weary and ever weary.

Alick Anderson did not keep us waiting long. In five minutes the manse door was reopened and he was back amongst us.

"H-s-s-h!" he warned silence. "Come this way."

He did not lead us to the manse, but round the back of the kirk to a secluded angle of the wall above the river.

"We can talk here." And then: "John Balfour is taken."

"The Dunbars?"

"Ay! three hours ago."

"Pity we weren't here sooner," regretted Tadg Mor.

"Well for us we werna. A strong party and all armed."

"He was taken by force?" I asked.

"He had to gang."

"If that was not force it was next door to it anyway," said Tadg Mor.

"And here we are—" began Ranald Ban bitterly.

"Wait—wait now!" said Alick Anderson quickly. "It is well that we are here, for I know the end of the road. Listen ye. Janet Calder is a faithful woman and in our trust. This is her story: John Balfour was out all day and did not return till nightfall. I know where he was. Three hours ago a strong party—a dozen or more, and two on horseback—came up to the door, and the horsemen went in to the minister. Wat Dunbar was not amongst them, but Janet kennt them for Dunbars. She did not hear what was said in the parlour room, but when they came out she was standing in the door of the back-place, and her master saw her out of an eye corner. He spoke then, lifting his voice.

" 'I will go if I must,' said he. 'The man—or woman—must need me sore to call me to Lochindorb Castle this hour o' night.'

" 'One of the men growled at him, but Janet noted the way he paused before 'woman'. Lochindorb! That's the place he has gone, and that is where Iseabal Rose is hidden. I know it. Ye will have heard of Lochindorb?"

"A loch somewhere near, I hope," said Ranald Ban.

"Ten miles south of here. A big bit lochan lost in the moors o' Dava, mires and moors all round it, and never a house or home within miles. But surely ye will have heard of the Wolf of Badenoch?"

"I have heard of him," said Ranald Ban. "He burned Forres and the big church at Elgin."

"That's him. They speak of him hereabouts yet, and he dead three hundred years. The natural son of a Scots king, and the bloodiest robber outside Ireland —your pardon, sirs. He did not give up burning and reiving—and waur things —till, like others, he was ower auld for such like lusty amusements. He died in sanctity, they say. However, one of his strongholds was in Lochindorb, and it a powerful strong stone castle near the middle of the loch, filling the whole of a small island.

"It was burned and its walls breached at long last, and no one has inhabited it for I don't know how long, but there are habitable rooms still in some of the towers, and the reivers out of Cromdale and Badenoch might use it as a hidie hole once in a while. That is where John Balfour is gone, and where Iseabal Rose is hidden. I might have thought o't afore now."

"We will go there," said Ranald Ban firmly. "Is there a boat?"

"There will be. There used to be a muckle flat-bottom for taking sheep and cattle in and out. But mark ye, if the castle is held, the boat will be moored at

it, and that's four cable-lengths off shore."

"I am wondering to myself," said Tadg Mor, "why they took the parson? Our *Roisin Dhuv*—is she ill on us?"

"There might be another reason," was all Alick Anderson said, and, though what that reason might be we all knew, we did not talk about it.

"WELL, soldier men?" said the shipmaster out of the silence. "This is where ye come in. Ye have been out with the great Marquis and will have some of his strategems. And there was Spynie Tower."

"I am thinking that the ablest head is the oldest one, shipmaster," said Ranald Ban. "Give us your own thoughts."

"Well then! this is how I see it. There are a score of desperate hard men to face—"

"Eighteen maybe," protested Black Rab mildly, and Tadg Mor made him grunt with a hard elbow.

"Eighteen or twenty, we must come at them in strength, and to get at them we must cross by boat and in the dark. Do you see any other way?"

"It is the best way."

"There are five of us—"

"Four," corrected Ranald Ban.

"Five, young man. I have brought down a cormorant at a hundred paces with a flintlock, and a Dunbar is an easier mark. Five I say, and my six sailormen—that's eleven; and Black Rab's four throatcutters, fifteen."

"Enough and to spare," said Tadg Mor.

"I'm no sure, and we must be sure. The Dunbars are fighting men. If yourself and Ranald Ban could slip friendly in amongst the Gordons and draw out the men of your choice we could be doin' fine wi' them."

"We can try it," agreed Ranald Ban. "But the boat?"

"I will take up the ship's cobble. It can be done easy with two horses and six men. And it can be done most of the road in broad day. Only a matter o' my business taking a bit boat to the Earl o' Moray's loch near Dava. I mind me once, ten years ago, hoisting a twenty-foot whaling boat all the way to Loch an Eilan in Rothiemurchus. No trouble at all. That's my plan—plain enough—and tomorrow night's the night if we can make the parts fit."

We talked it over there in the dark, and we could not better the main plan at any point; and the main plan was to get twenty men quietly to the shore of the loch in the first dark of night. For that we schemed, with all our wits sharpened by emergency.

"And that's that," said the rare Alick Anderson at the end, putting his hand on my arm. "There is one other thing in my mind. If we had a man lying at watch in the heather all day the morn it would be a great help when we are gathered—"

"This is my part," I answered the press of his hand, "if you tell me the road."

"I had you in my mind, Master Somers. We are more than half roads to the loch where we stand, and Rab Fraser could take you and choose a safe place where we could all gather to you."

"I know the place this minute," said Rab Fraser.

"And I could get a puckle scones and cakes from auld Janet for you," said Alick.

That is how it was settled.

Tadg Mor gripped me by the arm at the finish and brought his mouth near my ear.

"Whisper, Maurteen! Remember us stalking deer in Rannoch. Lie on your belly and keep your head down, and do not be thinking you can rescue *Roisin Dhuv* your lone. Are you hearing me?"

"I hear you. If you know me at all you will know that I will be too frightened to lift my head till you come."

CHAPTER XII

THE ROAD ENDS

IT was the long slow day's waiting I had above the shore of Lochindorb.

Black Rab Fraser had brought me by an old reiving track over the shoulder of a hill he called Aitnoch that was difficult only at the end, where the ground was boggy about a strong stream that flowed out of the northern end of the loch. This was his own country, and he knew it blindfolded. We had arrived there shortly before dawn, and he had posted me in a small grassy hollow on the eastern shore of the loch.

"The Wolf's castle is out there in front of you, as you will see," he had whispered. "This is the nearest point, but you are well hid. The bulk o' us will come in over the ridge behind you as soon's ever it's dark."

It was a long day. Luckily the curve of the hollow was deep enough for me to stand up and stretch my legs in without being visible from without. It was lipped on the loch side by a couple of low stunted junipers, and, as soon as the dawn came, I crept up and made a spy-hole in the thick prickly bush of one of them. It was a desolate and lonely scene that I surveyed, but a bonny one too.

First of all my eyes sought the old castle, and there it was in front of me, a full quarter mile from shore. It was bigger than I had expected—a great pile of ruins indeed. The island that held it would square to an acre, and the gray-stone outer walls, sound to the crenellations, rose from the water's edge. At three corners berstling towers lifted above the walls, two of them breached and in ruins, but the one at the northern corner furthest from me still showed part of a conical roof and a jut of chimney.

That chimney held my gaze for a long time. For if the ruins were occupied a fire would be welcome in these upland moors, and the chimney should give evidence. But there was no curl of smoke over all the broken towers. Still I would not yet be disheartened, for the morning was young, and rogues, as well as honest men, might still be in bed.

The loch, also, was a broader expanse than I had expected. I estimated it a mile in width from where I lay hidden, and I could see two miles or more of its length to the bristly bluff that jutted out into the water south of me. The breeze of morning rippled all its surface into cold silver, and I was near enough to hear the lap of water on the shingly beach.

Behind me a strong limestone-ribbed hill rose in two steep shelves, but on all other sides there was nothing but a lonely sea of heather: great brown billows of heather rolling upwards and curving over and heaving up again, to where, far in the south, serrated points were cold purple in the dawn. But that impression is not right. Those wide billows of heather were not flowing away from the loch, but seemed to be flowing and shouldering and converging down into the basin of it as if seeking to swallow it and keep it secret in their brown maw.

No doubt there were moorfowl and even deer amongst the hills, but that morning there was no sign or sound of life in all the desolation of the moors: no deer belled, no sheep bleated, no moor-cock crew, no eagle screamed, no hill-lark sang its morning song. There was nothing but a quietness of desolation that hid and hinted a strange austere beauty. That was Lochindorb as I saw it at first.

It was a long time after dawn before the ruins gave any sign of human habitation, and then the thing happened that I had been watching for. The smoke of a new fire curled from the ruined chimney of the berstling tower. The sight of

that smoke gave me a fine stir, and set me to a keener watch. Now that the light was stronger I could pick out things more clearly.

I was so placed that I had the whole eastern wall in view, and could also look along the northern or main front; and on that front I could make out the stern of a boat jutting from a bay of stone below the entrance barbican. More significant still, an iron helmet and a face below it appeared presently above the crenellations of the wall facing me, moved down to the breached corner tower, back again, and disappeared; and at regular intervals all through the day that head appeared, made its double turn, and dropped out of sight.

The place was held and warded. We would have to move very carefully in the dark and finish with a burst. I took good care to move my head very cautiously.

The day passed slowly yet not wearily. A sunny brisk day—but not cold—in the fall of the year, and a grand day for open marching, such marching as we had done one short year ago when we had put the fear of his own God in MacCailien Mhor. In that hard, glorious year I had learned to draw a mental armor about myself.

My body was tough as woodbine, though it was not powerful, and time and weariness I had grown not only to thole but to ignore. And so I could lie for hours below my juniper bush, no weariness on me, my mind, the force of living, sunk deep in me and resting, my eyes only alive and watching.

Some time in the day I slid to the bottom of the hollow, partook of buttered scones and oatcakes, and found that I was thirsty. But thirsty I had to remain, for I had forgotten to borrow Tadg Mor's flask, and I dared not crawl down to the shore, so short a distance from me. All the day after that I looked at the rippling water with a longing eye, but the discomfort was easily bearable for a man who had marched over stony Caol Ira in hot July.

The day passed. Occasionally small clouds crossed the sun, and shadows ran smoothly across the serenity of the moors. I was as quiet as those shadows. What I thought about, if I thought at all, I do not remember, but I do know that, for my own reason, I held my mind away steadfastly from the future.

This thing I was now bearing I could bear; this crisis I was now facing I could face; this thing I had come here to do I would do; and after that let life take its own road. I was a young man in years, but that mighty year, packed close with life and death, had made my mind old. I was no longer a youth. I no longer dreamed and planned. I was in a bad way, though I did not know it, for, unless life took a fresh start, life for me would be only a thing of irony.

IT was close to sunset that things began to move; and then things moved quickly. Two or three men appeared on the stone platform in front of the main entrance and the stern of the boat disappeared and was replaced by its bow. And shortly after that it began to fill with men. That startled me, and I watched with all my eyes. What I looked for was a woman, and I was near enough to distinguish one if one there was. There was no woman that I could discern. They were all men in the half panoply of war, except one man in hodden gray.

The boat swung out into the open water; and under the drive of four long sweeps came towards me, but not directly. Some distance down the shore to my right the water had been deepened close-in by piling the stones of the bottom to make the jut of a landing place, and for that landing place the boat made.

There were two men in that boat I knew well. One was John Balfour the

minister; I could not mistake the pallid strength of his features. The other was Walter Dunbar. He sat in the stern, his head bare, with the low sun making it ruddier than ever, and he wore no steel on his breast. I looked back at the ruins. No one moved about it now, but the chimney still smoked. Was Iseabal Rose there all alone?

The big party landed and I thought: "If twenty men were with me here this thing would finish now."

But Walter Dunbar did not land. He took his seat in the middle thwart of the boat, and grasped two of the long sweeps in his great hands. Voices came up to me but I could not distinguish words, except once that Dunbar said "morrow," or "morning." The squad fell into military formation, and it was then I counted them.

Black Rab Fraser was right. There were eighteen men. Many of them I knew from the Alford campaign: rough, hard-fighting fellows unquestioningly attached to their leader. At a word they marched away northwards on the rough track winding by the shore, the track I had come in on. John Balfour was in the middle file; once, he turned face to the island and lifted a hand as if in prayer or blessing. The man behind pushed him on, but not roughly. I did not spend any time watching him go. My attention came back to Dunbar, who worked the boat round, pulled slowly back to the castle, moored in the old place and disappeared.

The next ten or more minutes were bad ones for me. Walter Dunbar was back in the ruins. Was Iseabal Rose there? Were they alone? Why had John Balfour been brought, and what had he done? What was—?

I stopped there and began again, and my mind grew more and more troubled. Was Iseabal Rose alone with Walter Dunbar? That question my mind dwelt on. I knew then how well I liked that small dark quiet woman, and I knew that the breaking of her quietness and her strength must hurt me too.

The sun was down now, but I estimated a full hour yet to the coming of my friends.

"I cannot stand that hour," I spoke aloud to myself. And I went into the bottom of the hollow and stood looking down at the ground.

"I can never stand against that hour," I said again, and slowly unbelted my sword. I stripped off my broadcloth coat. A year ago it had been a good coat, but now it was stained green by sun and weather, and gaped at the elbows: and only one button was left. That button had been sewn on by Iseabal Rose on Gallows Hill above Alford.

That thought made me hurry. I stripped off my shirt, braced my trews tight at the waist, took off my old brogans—I wore no foot hose—placed my flat leather cap on the little pile, and topped it with sword and targe. I stood up then stripped to the waist, and the evening air brushed its cool fingers on my naked back.

I climbed out of the hollow and walked down to the shore, the heather stinging my bare feet. I looked across at the castle and for the first time it seemed far away, floating double in a dimension of its own; for the evening air was still now and every ragged wall and tower was mirrored in the silver floor of the loch. A strange wan floor of silver, sunk here below moors that were now dark and sinister below a sky paler and wanner than the wan self-shining waters. And then a feeding trout shattered the surface of the mirror, and the reflected towers shivered in the widening rings.

I waded slowly out, making no splash, and the cold tang of the water made my throat flutter. But I was used to cold. When I was waist-deep I cupped my hands and drank. The water was not peaty and had little white specks floating in it. And then I remembered a

thing Tadg Mor always did before plunging in for a swim in the Slaney. I did that now, though I was not a Roman. I dipped my fingers in the water and signed the cross on my forehead. Then I lay out slowly in the water, holding my breath against the sting, and began to swim.

I was never a strong swimmer; that was why I dared not take a weapon to weigh me; and I was not sure, even then, of making that smooth quarter mile. In Ireland I used to swim a hundred yards of the Slaney and back again, and pant on the bank, Tadg Mor laughing at me, for he could swim and dive like a wild duck.

I set my mind against all impulse to hurry, sank my head low in the water, and struck out slow and steady in the breast stroke, the only stroke I knew. The water splayed back from my chin in long smooth ripples. The light was still strong enough for any watcher to see me from the island, but I no longer cared.

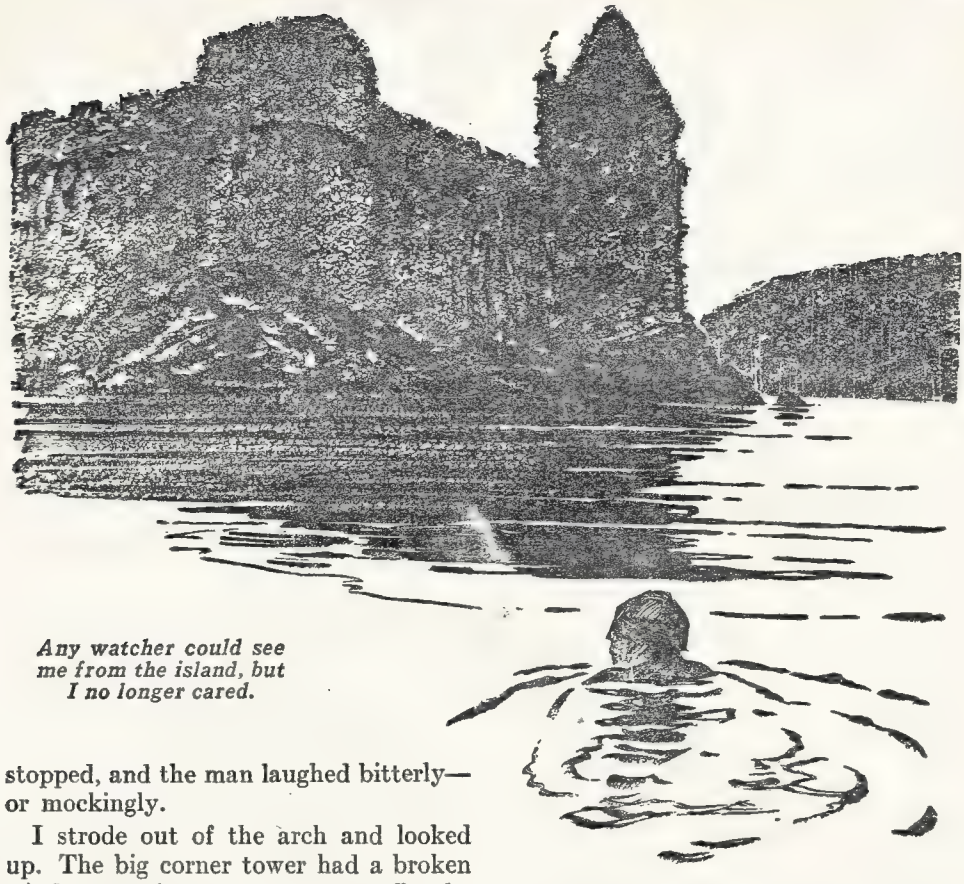
I DO believe that, in the mood that was on me then, I could have made the width of the loch. I made the ruins without difficulty. The water was cold, but I was warm enough, though not winded. I came to shore below the eastern wall where the water was deep close in. There was a narrow base of boulders along the wall, and I scrambled my way carefully over these to the corner turning the north side below an overhanding turret. I looked round the corner to where the boat, a big flat-bottom, was moored in its shallow basin.

There was not a stir anywhere. Keeping close to the wall, I slipped along to the boat. When I got there I found that on the within-side of it was a deep right-angled recess, paved roughly, with the main entrance at the back of it. That entrance was now only a ruined arch, and I could look straight through it to a wide patch of gray-green, mounded grass: the old bailly yard of the stronghold. The light was still strong enough to show me a big elder bush growing at the base of the far wall, and I could even distinguish the purple splash of its over-ripe berries.

I turned to the boat and considered it for a space. The thing I was about to do now took all my resolution. Then I untied the mooring rope from a jut of stone, slipped into the water, here only thigh deep, pivoted the prow round to face the loch, and gave the stern a steady long push off shore. The water made a soft lapping ripple and that was the only sound. Any drift of air or water was down the loch towards the stream that drained it, and anyone who wanted that boat would need to swim for it or wait till it beached. I was alone on the island with Walter Dunbar and whoever else was with him, and I could expect no aid for nearly an hour.

I went through the arch, but I no longer crept or crawled close to the wall. I was fearful enough, but my mind was as stripped as my body, and knew that now no fearfulness could bring its prudence to my aid. I stopped at the mouth of the arch and looked across the bailly: a ragged half acre of grass, crumbling stones peeping through it, surrounded by ruined walls that stood stark against the pallor of the sky, broken windows like eyes watching me. No one, nothing moved anywhere, and there was no sound.

And then from somewhere overhead came the murmur of a man's voice, low at first and then rising and growing vehement, so that I almost caught the words. The speaker was Walter Dunbar. The voice stopped and after a pause another answered it. And my heart leaped and went on beating faster. For though the voice was only a murmur that never lifted I knew it for the voice of Iseabal Rose: that low, slow-moving voice that I had not forgotten. It



Any watcher could see me from the island, but I no longer cared.

stopped, and the man laughed bitterly—or mockingly.

I strode out of the arch and looked up. The big corner tower had a broken window-opening one story off the ground, looking into the bailly, and in the slowly gathering gloaming, the reflection of a fire inside shone on the gapped stones framing it. There was no doorway in the base of the tower, but there was a broken one in the wall nearby it. To that I went and found a stairway open to the sky. Many of the stone steps were gone, but enough remained to take me upwards to the head of the wall inside the crenellated curtain. Facing me was the tower and in it a doorway closed by a rough shield of planks. Through the many chinks came the glow of the fire within. There was silence now.

On silent bare feet I took the half-dozen paces between me and the door. There was no lock or latch on the outside, and I placed my hand softly on the wood and pressed. It gave stiffly for a few inches, and then jerked and fell back with a crash against the wall. And in the very crash of it a man exclaimed loudly, and there was Walter Dunbar on his feet, facing me from the fireside.

THE room I looked into was a round stone room under the eaves of a tower. A part of the conical roof had been blown away but the hole was roughly closed with a thatch of heather. A fire of bog pine blazed brightly in the open fireplace, and the dying light of the day came through the inner window. Other than a couch of heather and pine-tops, a bench, and a rough chair, there were no furnishings in that room.

Walter Dunbar had just leaped up from the bench. Iseabal Rose sat very

still in the chair facing round to the door. They had been sitting there talking to each other, and though his voice had gathered vehemence, hers had retained its old calmness.

I thought then of the first time I had seen Iseabal Rose. That had been in the prison-room of Ardclach bell-tower; and, then too, she had sat in her chair and looked at me standing in the doorway, and her quietness had impressed its force on my mind for all time. She sat very still now too, the quietness of her unbroken by gladness or grief, her eyes fixed on me, and her hands clasped gently on her lap over my old war-cloak that was draped loosely about her waist. And again I was surprised by the soft dusky loveliness of her.

"Who is it?" asked Dunbar harshly, taking one stride forward.

He might well ask. Standing there naked to the waist, black-haired, black-eyed, black-chinned, I must have looked an outlandish savage out of an outlandish clime. Iseabal Rose answered for me.

"It is Martin Somers out of Ireland." Her voice was a soft bell. "Here in my heart I have been waiting for him this hour his cloak about me. He always comes in my need."

I walked across the floor on silent feet, and Dunbar took his one stride back. He was in gallant dress, ribbons at his buckled knees, his vest ruffled, his fine red hair brushed back and held by a band. He wore no sword or dagger. A grand shapely man, tall as Tadg Mor, and even more supple than Ranald Ban in the swing of his shoulders.

I stood between them looking into the fire that flamed sibilantly, and he was near enough to put his hand on me if he wanted to. I felt the warmth of the fire on my bare breast and a little steam curled from my wet knees. And Iseabal Rose said softly:

"What strong clean bodies men have!"

That quiet mood of hers impressed itself on me—and on him too. There was no need to lose tempers and tear passions in this stark hour. Dunbar's voice was queerly detached.

"Martin Somers, indeed! and he is not welcome. No man likes to be disturbed on his marriage night."

I turned to her.

"Are you his wife, Iseabal?" My voice was not steady, I fear.

"I am not his wife, Martin. I never will be."

"Why do you lie, Dunbar?"

"This is my marriage night, nevertheless. Are you alone, Somers?"

"I will not lie to you. I am alone now, but twenty of my friends will be here within an hour."

"Why are you here?"

"To tell you that the game is played."

"The game has still an hour to run, and in an hour many things might happen. A man might die many deaths in an hour."

"One only."

"In an hour I could be out of here and hidden in the heather with my wife."

"I thought of that. Your boat is afloat far out on the loch. Until my friends come we three stay here alive or dead."

"You choose death very surely."

"No. The choice will be yours. Listen! You can choose death now or in an hour, or you can choose life; but if you choose life you lose Iseabal Rose."

"That is no choice. I have set all my will on that woman. You know that. And I have been patient. Have I not been very patient? I even brought John Balfour to marry us, and she would not. Do you think that the closeness of death will make me yield now? You fool!"

"All that is true," I agreed. "The choice is not a fair one for a man gone mad."

"Then I will give you two your choice; and I will trust you. You will hold your friends off and Iseabal Rose will promise to be my wife in wedlock, or you will

die, and the woman will be mine before I die. Choose!"

But Iseabal Rose turned to me.

"You are not afraid of death, Martin?"

"Not this night, Iseabal."

"Once you told me to hold my own soul against all travail. I have done it. Do you likewise. Be not afraid, Maurteen. Ranald Ban MacKinnon will do for me what I ask him, and my soul clean will be with yours within the hour."

I smiled at her.

"My dear, you will comb your hair white as snow, your grandchildren about your knees."

I turned to Dunbar then and took the single step that brought me close.

HE crashed his mighty fist downwards at my head, but I fell close against him, and my hands found his neck. And as my hands tightened a red spark crackled in my brain, and my eyes had a strange vision. I saw unknown trees slashing in a high wind, their trunks roped with knotted vines, and long beards of gray moss streaming from their branches; and cowering dunes where the sand blew in a brown haze over tossing narrow blue waters; and a clearing where tall corn shook its wide flags near a long hut of bark sheltering below swaying cypresses; and one blue red-necked bird hurtled itself from one tree to another. I never had seen that place in life, but I do think that the Indian blood in me was in control then, and I know now that what I saw in that vision was the mouth of the James River in the New World where my mother was born.

And once I caught a glimpse of Iseabal's face close to mine, and the flame in her eyes was the flame in the eyes of a fighting wolf bitch.

After that I saw nothing, and I heard nothing but the turmoil of the wind as it in my vision.

FROM a long way off I heard a voice that I had known in another life.

"God! We will never get his fingers loose without breaking them."

That was the voice of one Dod Myron, who had stood by Tadg Mor and me in Spynie Tower a thousand years ago. Were we back there again? Was I dead under Covenant swords? And then another voice came nearer and nearer until it was within my ear.

"Maurteen, Maurteen! It is me. Can't you hear me? Whisper! It is me. It is me myself." And a big gentle hand smoothed down my bare back.

"Tadg Mor, brother!" I whispered, and all my bruised body relaxed.

He had me on my feet and whipped round the other way from the thing that lay on the floor, and his hand and sleeve were busy wiping the blood from my face and my mouth.

"Two fine black eyes you will have to yourself by morning," said he.

I saw Ranald Ban then, nostrils and eyes flaring; and Alick Anderson, his face strong and hard below a leather helmet, and Dod Myron the Gordonach, his mouth open; and I saw Black Rab Fraser, and he was holding Iseabal Rose on her feet.

"Iseabal!"

And she came to me. She was wearing her dark green dress cut square at the neck, but the square was now torn, showing the hollow of her throat and the white of her breast; there was a stain on her lips and a graze above her black brows.

"I did what I could, Maurteen," said she.

I lifted her chin and looked at her face carefully.

"You will have a fine black eye your own self by morning," I told her.

And at that her face broke like a child's, and her mouth was against my breast; and I held her and smoothed my hand through the soft dark of her hair.

(The End)

THE AGENT FROM BERLIN

By ARED WHITE

"There is no time for explanations," Elton whispered.

THE beginning of what grew into the Boettner spy tangle was a cabled tip-off to the French Deuxième Bureau at Paris from a French undercover diplomat in war-time Berlin. The message was dispatched via Copenhagen. Deciphered, it read:

Arrest German spy calling himself Boettner due in Paris on express from Bordeaux October 20 disguised Belgian artillery captain.

Attesting the amazing accuracy of the message, Boettner stepped from the express train indicated right on the dot and thus into the arms of a Deuxième Bureau reception committee. The French, unable to get further details out of Berlin or to exact them from the luckless German, were left to their own deductions. First, Herr Boettner must be a spy of exceptional importance, else their important diplomatic agent in Berlin

would not have cabled the tip-off. Second, the Boettner mission must have been of the first magnitude, since it was evident that Herr Boettner had been landed into the Bay of Biscay, south of Bordeaux, by submarine from Kiel.

Herr Boettner himself, sleek, suave, outwardly unperturbed by his arrest, declined helpful comment. He said, with a catlike smile, that he was a man of peace who had come to Paris in the the interest of ending the war. Beyond that he had nothing to say. Since there was no getting any farther, the French bureau had their uninvited guest tried for espionage, sentenced to execution, and then shunted him to Prison Roquet to await final transfer and execution at the Fortress of Vincennes.

What brought the American secret service into the case at this juncture was the capture of a Dane spy-runner in the act of running the American lines with a cipher message secreted under his tongue. Colonel Rand, American counter-espionage chief overseas, turned prisoner and cipher over to his star field agent, Major Fox Elton. Elton, guessing that the cipher might be some ordinary transposition affair, decided on a try at it himself, before submitting it to the cryptographic section. The message, at first glance, was a random jotting of numerals:

64909	25452	93709	07151	51547	28490	71837
06382	82919	46052	62547	26382	82635	26293
71946	27461	93527	19171	52729	15171	54825
49461	54736	36162	54917	35470	93715	27293
71546	27473	72946	26494	51527	16051	73945
17354	71718	45254	51516	25471	84549	37154
54649	45152	62745	4			

On the theory that each number or pair of numbers was the symbol for a letter of the English alphabet, usual medium for German spy messages coming into France, Elton began searching for high frequency letters, such as E, T, A, O, I and N. With the night before him, he tried test after test until the floor under him was carpeted in crumpled sheets of paper. Satisfying himself that he had identified the letters, E, T and N, he set about a piecemeal construction of a cipher key. Morning was breaking before his labors netted him a formula that could not be questioned:

	9	8	7	6	5
4	a	b	c	d	e
3	f	g	h	i	j
2	k	l	m	n	o
1	p	q	r	s	t
0	u	v	w	y	z

This key, working from top to left, meant that each two numbers symbolized a single letter of the English alphabet, as he had suspected at the outset of his labors. The first letter of each two revealed the column of letters intended, the second letter the row. Thus, taking 6, the first numeral in the message, it identified a letter in the first column, and the second figure 4, found at the left, told the row and thus placed the exact letter intended. The cipher message, by that process, translated into the following message:

Duke of Wurttemburg will pay one million francs for prompt release his nephew from French. Mandatory that Herr Boettner be freed at once.—K-1.

Elton's blue eyes sparkled into vitality. No ordinary spy case this, but an

intrigue that might lead anywhere. He hurried into the espionage section and scanned the French Intelligence reports in the case of Herr Boettner. The French confessed inability to identify the man further. No agent named Boettner was listed in the Allied record of German spies. Photographs, fingerprints, Bertillon measurements, questioning of numerous German prisoners, had netted them nothing.

From the Belgian secret service the French had received a hint that Boettner might be Kurt von Falkenheyn, ace of German spies, the Prussian shadow who had rummaged British naval headquarters and even French G Q G. But there was no proof of this. Besides, what did it matter now, since a French firing squad was a satisfactory solution, no matter what the man's true identity or whatever the mischief he had intended in Paris?

Since day was just breaking when he finished his cipher tests, Elton walked out through the medieval French village that housed American general heaquarters, had breakfast at the Hôtel de France, mulled over the available facts, and reported to Colonel Rand just as that officer arrived at the American caserne from billet.

The counter-espionage chief's face lighted as he read the broken cipher.

"That'll give the French a big thrill down at Paris, Elton!" Rand exulted, reaching for his desk phone. He paused, in the act of lifting the receiver, and inquired, "You're sure, are you, that you've deciphered the thing correctly?"

"So far as the cipher is concerned, yes," Elton replied. "But if the colonel intends notifying the French, I think that ought to wait, sir."

"Why wait?" Rand demanded. "This Boettner case belongs to the French—and it's all over but shooting their man."

"But there are some interesting implications in the message, sir, that I'd like to look into."

"For example?"

"Well, the phrase 'Duke of Wurttemburg' may be the real thing or it may be code. But more important, sir, is that offer of a million francs."

Colonel Rand scowled meditatively over the message, then looked up sharply at Elton.

"But who would be more likely to offer such a sum, Elton? Certainly no ordinary mortal would pay a million francs for someone's release. That's what makes me think the message must mean what it says."

"Possibly so, colonel. But don't overlook the fact that the real German spies, the best of them in France, are of the military caste who'd resent being treated as mercenaries by any such offer. Therefore, that million francs is for the benefit of someone other than a German agent, isn't that logical?"

"See here, Elton, what are you driving at?"

"The colonel has heard the whisper going about. Even the Deuxième Bureau knows it—has been working on it. Somewhere in Paris is an Allied agent who's playing the Prussian game. A dangerous traitor in our own camp. In light of that, doesn't this sound like an appeal to our unknown traitor?"

Colonel Rand stared for a time straight ahead, his fingers beating a nervous tattoo on his desk top. Presently he squirmed uncomfortably in his chair.

"You know well enough, Elton, how fussy these French are," he argued. "If we poke our nose into this mess, the whole Deuxième Bureau might get gloriously sore, even if we succeeded."

"On the other hand, sir," Elton said dryly, "comes the question of whether our job in France is to please the French or help win the war. I'd like to remind the colonel that we've suffered plenty from those leaks down in Paris. Cost us our St. Mihiel battle plans, two transports, and a lot of other grief."

After another period of deliberation

Colonel Rand asked tentatively, "Just what do you propose doing?"

"The obvious thing, colonel. If you'll approve a deal with that Dane spy-runner, I'll talk him out of his identification formula and carry that intercepted cipher message on into Paris myself. It might net us a pretty sizable fish."

It took considerable time and much more of Elton's argument to get the Rand approval. After a long period of floor pacing and desk tapping the colonel finally yielded his fear of internal friction with French military authority.

"Watch your step, Elton," he admonished. "Keep me thoroughly posted over the long distance from Paris—and if you make any important arrests, let the French in on the kill, if possible. Good luck."

ELTON went at once across the parade grounds of the caserne to the little stone building that housed the headquarters guard. The Dane spy-runner, held incommunicado in a cell, was a rawboned, stooped little man, reticent, stubbornly resigned to his fate. Since he spoke no English and only a smattering of French, Elton conducted negotiations in German. It took several hours of effort to get it through the Dane's head that the evidence against him was complete, that he was doomed to certain execution on the evidence already at hand, and that no trick lay behind the offer of his life in exchange for information.

Once the Dane's tongue loosened, he confessed this was his third junket into France with German messages. Who wrote them, or what information they conveyed, he had no faintest idea. A countryman of his had engaged him at Copenhagen each time, paying five thousand francs, payment on arrival at Paris. By late afternoon Elton had gained from the Dane his destination in the French metropolis and his formula of identification.

A fast plane from Colombes les Belles, held in readiness at nearby Hanlon field, landed Elton at Paris shortly before sundown. An American military sedan met him at Orlay landing field and sped him to American military police headquarters on Rue St. Anne. There he exchanged uniform for a suit of old clothes and secured a set of bogus passports, from the G-2 stock, showing him to be a neutral from Denmark in Paris on an authorized business mission having to do with the sale of optical instruments of precision.

His destination was the office of a French surgeon named Levigne on Rue Notre Dame. In approaching that place he used taxicabs, changing vehicles half a dozen times. The doctor was a gnarled old man, much too old and decrepit for military service. Several patients, old women and children, were in the waiting room of the doctor's well equipped suite. When he had disposed of them he looked at Elton in mute inquiry from behind thick lenses that gave vision to a pair of large, owlish black eyes.

"I want my mouth looked at," Elton said in broken French.

"But it is past my hours of practice," the doctor fumed. "Why do you come at this hour with a trivial complaint?"

"I was here at three minutes of nineteen hours," Elton persisted.

"But what is it ails you?" the Frenchman demanded.

"There's something wrong under my tongue, monsieur," Elton complained significantly.

The old doctor hesitated, his owlish eyes searching Elton furtively, as if some vague suspicion stirred in his mind despite the perfect repetition of the words of identification. Then he muttered something to himself, stepped forward to pry open his visitor's mouth, and deftly extracted the capsuled cipher message from under Elton's tongue.

"I will give you your medicine," he said, disappeared for a moment into an-

other room, and returned with a compact wad of French banknotes. "You are a new one," he mumbled, "and therefore I must tell you to get out of Paris tonight. *Adieu, monsieur.*"

Elton paused to check through the currency. Exactly five thousand francs, in large notes. Then he mouthed a broken thanks and stalked out of the office into Rue Notre Dame.

From the shadows of a doorway across the street, Elton waited developments. Dr. Levigne, he guessed, was a mere trusted receiver. From his hands the message would go on to its destination. Either Levigne would take it personally or someone would call, since too many intermediaries were not prudent in such infamous business as this. Five thousand francs for the run from Copenhagen, a million francs for Boettner's rescue from death. That could only spell big game at the final destination of the little cipher pellet.

Thirty minutes of waiting in the October chill and Elton suddenly felt the leap of his pulse as a large French limousine whirred into the Rue Notre Dame and purred to a stop in front of Dr. Levigne's. Even under the vague glow of shaded war-time street lights, he saw that it was an official car, driven by a chauffeur in French uniform. The chauffeur sprang from his seat and opened the door of the tonneau. A small, beefy man in evening clothes, head topped by high French silk hat, stepped out and waddled into the building that housed Dr. Levigne.

Ten minutes later the visitor emerged, waddled back to his limousine and drove off. Elton's eyes searched out every visible detail in the dim light. He got a mental picture of gait, posture, bulk and a glint of light that betrayed eye-glasses. Enough, he told himself, to identify his man under favorable circumstances. Cautiously slipping from cover, he ran on tiptoe after the limousine, keeping to the shadows, until he found a taxicab into which he vaulted, ordering the driver to follow the big military car ahead.

The big limousine proceeded without undue speed into the Rue de Rennes, west on that thoroughfare to Boulevard Raspail and thence into Boulevard St. Germain. Elton felt a stir of excitement as he saw that his mysterious quarry must be headed for the Ministere de la Guerre, confirmation of a traitor of the first water.

Halting at a discreet distance, Elton saw the fat little man draw up in front of the war ministry and waddle inside that great beehive of Allied war secrets. Instantly he ordered his driver to rush through Paris to Rue St. Anne. In his present disguise Elton knew that he could not penetrate the Ministere de la Guerre, would be turned back by the sentries at the door. But in his American uniform, with his carte d'identité as an Intelligence officer, he would be able to pass on inside, follow the hot trail that might land him the most important mercenary of the whole war.

On reaching American military police headquarters he leaped from the cab, intent on grabbing up his effects and changing clothes in the taxicab as it sped him back to Boulevard St. Germain. As he entered the door, a noisy exclamation greeted him.

"Where the devil you been, Elton!" shouted an assistant provost marshal. "The whole force is combing Paris for you. Report to the provost marshal, fast as you know how!"

Puzzled by the command, Elton went into the provost marshal's quarters. A colonel, nervously pacing the floor, halted in his tracks and his face lighted up.

"Thank God they've found you at last, Elton!" he shouted. "Here, get moving—on the run! I've got a fast car waiting outside—and a plane is all heated up ready to take off."

The colonel, suiting action to words, rushed up to grip Elton's arm and start him towards the door.

"But what's the holy rush, colonel?" Elton remonstrated. "Did it ever occur to you I might have unfinished business in Paris?"

"Not this trip!" the colonel shot back. "The old man at headquarters wants you and wants you quick! Three calls every ten minutes. We've had half Paris out looking for you!"

"But see here, colonel—the general'll have to wait," Elton argued. "I'm on the biggest case of the whole war—something I stumbled into. It's more important—"

"When the commander-in-chief of the A.E.F. sends for anyone, they're on their way!" the provost marshal thundered. "Here, step out faster!"

Elton groaned at the utter futility of further argument. He followed on leaden feet to a big sedan at the curb outside. The car plummeted through Paris to the aviation field at Orlay where a plane was warmed up for the take-off. The ship drove immediately into the air, headed into the east at full throttle.

Colonel Rand, visibly tense, was waiting when the plane taxied to a stop at Hanlon field, just outside headquarters. The colonel hurried up to seize Elton by the arm.

"When the old man wants anyone he wants him in a hurry!" the colonel exclaimed. "I'm shooting you out to his château, where he's holed in for the night!"

"If I may be permitted to say so, sir," Elton grumbled, "the general picked one deuce of a time for this. If I had been let alone for the night I might have landed the most important spy of the war, colonel."

"Now don't let four stars bluff you, Elton," Rand said, ignoring his subordinate's complaint. "He told me he'd leave the decision to you, and don't you stick your neck into any noose!"

"But I haven't the faintest idea what this is all about," Elton reminded. "Just as I was about to—"

"Another junket to Berlin!" Rand broke in. "The chief wants to shoot you up there hell bent. I told him the Imperial secret service is hunting you—put a million marks reward on your head last month. I told him they've got your fingerprints, photograph—and that it's suicide for you right now!"

Elton made no comment. Colonel Rand pushed him into the general's fast limousine, banged the door and the car streaked into the night. Elton sat back in the cushions, his face set in brooding. Not at the threat of a trip to Berlin. That destination filled him with no misgivings. It was the broken trail behind him, the traitor who had slipped through his fingers in Paris. There was no turning the case, with its delicate network of leads and implications, over to another operative; and by the time he could complete a Berlin foray that trail at Paris would be a cold trail. It was one thing to know the lair of a high traitor, another to hang up proof of guilt.

But by the time he reached the general's château, Elton's face had relaxed its grim lines, he was sitting tensely upright. Swiftly his mind was piecing that case at Paris into his mission to Berlin. Despite Colonel Rand's advice, Elton knew he could not reject the adventure across the Rhine. Neither, if he drove a shrewd bargain with the general, need he abandon that spy nest at the Ministere de la Guerre.

An orderly flung open the door of his limousine as the car shrieked to a stop in front of the magnificent château that housed the American commander. A staff officer was waiting for him at the door to hurry him through a long, wide reception hall, with its medieval splendor, to a library where the general sat at a desk once used by Napoleon.

The general looked up in a swift, searching appraisal of the young officer in front of him. Behind the clear blue eyes, composed features, and a certain

untroubled innocence of expression, his practiced eyes must have picked up at once the mettle of the man, the alert intelligence, quick resourcefulness and unyielding determination. The commander's anxious, severe face relaxed into approval.

"I'm told, Elton," he said without preliminary, "that they've a price of a million marks on your scalp up in Berlin."

"Yes, sir, I've been told the same thing," Elton replied with an easy smile.

"Well, there's information I want from Berlin that's worth many million times a million marks," the general said quickly. "We've the report that there's a storm brewing in Germany—that the bulk of the people demand peace at any price. We hear that the chancellor, the Reichstag, the masses, insist that Germany can't stand up through another winter. If that report is verified, it will shape our strategies during the next few months. It will save us from shipping another two million men over here from the United States."

"I'm subject to orders, sir," Elton reminded.

"But—under the circumstances, I can't exactly put it that way, Elton. Your chief says it's suicide for you to try Berlin again. But, if you succeeded, it would be a service of the highest importance, perhaps the most important service performed by an individual this year, I'm leaving the decision to you."

"I have no hesitation in accepting the detail," Elton said, and added after a thoughtful pause, "but if I'm to succeed, my best chance lies in what I might term a sort of personally conducted tour, sir."

"All right, just what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that if I could manage to get a certain German prisoner released by the French under conditions that made it appear I had effected his escape, I might get by in Berlin for a day or two by going there with him. From available information the man I want is a nephew of the Duke of Wurttemburg—and possibly I could count somewhat upon his gratitude."

"Yes, I've heard of that case," the general said, scowling. "Sentenced to execution, wasn't he?"

"Yes, sir."

The general's face retained its scowl through several moments of deliberation, then he looked up decisively.

"Under the circumstances, I'm sure I can arrange that with Clemenceau and Foch. My aide will give you further details of what to look for in Berlin. Good luck, major."

THE French Deuxiéme Bureau lieutenant who accompanied Elton to the Fortress at Vincennes, outside the Porte de Piepus at Paris, knew only that he had orders from his superior to escort an unnamed Intelligence agent to an interview with the mysterious Herr Boettner. The German had been transferred from the Prison Roquet for execution at the old French fortress, a sentence fixed for the next rising of the sun.

In the eight hours since his interview with the American supreme commander, Elton had wrought the intricate pattern of a desperate adventure. He knew that from the moment he entered the French fortress he must pay hide and seek with death. Boettner's escape itself might end in a fusillade of French bullets, since there was no taking of prison officials into confidence. Should the slightest suspicion of a trick filter into Herr Boettner's brain, that would mean a Berlin firing squad later.

But the high stakes he played for filled Elton with exhilaration. Confidence, caution, audacity were his weapons and an alert attention to every devious detail of his plan. He wore civilian clothes, of French cut, carried passports showing him to be Monsieur Bodine, a neutral from Copenhagen, dealing in azimuth instruments. His purpose in interviewing

Herr Boettner was explained as being for the purposes of possible identification.

Elton's Deuxième Bureau escort, Lieutenant Laforge, asked no questions, preserving the official reserve that his orders and mission suggested. On reaching the fortress they were taken to the dungeon where Herr Boettner was held waiting for his death in the morning.

"I would request, monsieur," Elton said placidly to Laforge, as they entered the Boettner cell, "that we conduct our interview privately and wholly undisturbed."

Laforge dismissed the death sentry. Herr Boettner was seated on the iron bed of his cell, reading a French newspaper. He looked up out of a pair of clear, unperturbed gray eyes, then rose.

"I must apologize, messieurs, for my lack of accommodations," he greeted them, his eyes lighting up with a cynical sort of amusement, "but French hospitality does not permit me chairs for my guests. Please be seated on my bed and tell me what you want."

"Monsieur Bodine has official sanction to interview you," Laforge explained, indicating Elton with a nod.

"Of course," Boettner assented, fixing Elton with an icy smile. "I presume Monsieur Bodine also has official sanction to offer me my life in barter for certain information, in which event Monsieur Bodine is wasting my time—which, just now, is valuable to me because there's so little remaining."

"On the contrary, Herr Boettner," Elton rejoined, "I have only a few routine questions, which can't possibly embarrass you."

The German was plainly puzzled by the interview that followed, questions about the details of his arrest and trial, his rations and treatment at the prison, questions that had no obvious significance. But Elton was merely taking time to size up his man, wait for the precise moment of his next act.

Boettner, he saw, was no ordinary agent. Behind the possessed play of the Germans' features was iron discipline, a shrewd, fast intelligence. He must have been close to thirty, of medium build, with well moulded features that might have passed him for German, Belgian, or French, of the better class. The kind of man, Elton thought, who might belong to the house of Wurttemburg, or again merely to the Imperial military caste. In any even a man trained by the hard school of the Imperial secret service to mask feelings, personality and thoughts—and to face a firing squad, if the game went against him, without a whimper.

At a moment when his French escort, seated on the cot beside Boettner and growing bored with the exchange, was indulging a yawn, Elton went into action. He sprang forward, tense fingers thrust ahead of him to grip Laforge's windpipe. With a deft movement he thrust a gag into the Frenchman's gaping mouth and secured it with a stout thong, then hurled him on the cot and bound hands and ankles.

"There is no time for explanations, Herr Boettner," Elton whispered. "Our one chance is to act coolly and lose no time!"

Quickly, by manipulating the thongs that bound Laforge, they stripped him of his uniform and dressed him in Boettner's French prison denims with their garish "PG" painted in white across the back. The Laforge uniform fitted the condemned German perfectly. Elton passed Boettner a cigarette, cast a blanket over the prostrate figure on the cot, and called the sentry.

"The German pig went into a funk, refused to talk—and buried his head like an ostrich," Elton said disgustedly as the sentry came to unlock the door of the cell.

Boettner emerged close behind Elton, ostentatiously smoking the cigarette and thus managing to keep a hand across the

lower part of his face. They walked swiftly down the corridors, trailed by the unsuspecting sentry, passed out the outer bars and climbed into the commercial cab that had brought Elton out from Paris. Passing back through the Porte de Picpus, they dismissed the cab at Rue de Bercy. As soon as the cab disappeared, Elton hurried to a black official sedan that was standing at the curb nearby.

Neither spoke as they sped to the Porte d'Ivry and thence to the east on the route to Provins. Elton sat tensely at the wheel, feeding the car its full speed. There was France to be spanned, the Franco-Swiss frontier to be reached before the alarm spread. He knew that once the ruse at Vincennes was discovered, the alarm would be scattered throughout France. Only those in supreme authority knew the game that lay under the surface of that brash raid at Vincennes, a secret that dared not be trusted too far. Therefore the route to Switzerland was lined with dangers.

They had passed Provins, headed into the road towards Sens, before Herr Boettner broke the silence.

"To whom am I indebted for this service, monsieur?" he asked.

"I'm not allowed to mention names, Herr Boettner," Elton shot back, his eyes glued to the burning road. "But he said I was to see you into Berlin and collect a million francs from the Duke of Wurttemburg."

"I supposed that was the case," Boettner remarked, after a long, thoughtful silence. "But I had no right to expect such help from that source and hope my noble friend did not embarrass himself." His voice hardened into sharp authority. "You'll not take the risks of the Swiss frontier. At the town of Sens, you'll turn south and follow the route I give you. We ought to be in Berlin for dinner, with a bit of luck!"

Elton obeyed instructions, suspecting Boettner's purpose. A few kilometers south of Sens, Boettner directed the car into an obscure road, lined in ancient elms. A few minutes later the German gave a sharp exclamation. Behind, on the main artery they had just left, a large staff car shot to the east, followed by a second and a third. The German chuckled.

"The wolves are hot on our trail, monsieur," he said. "But we haven't far to go."

Another five kilometers and they turned into a bumpy little road that led past a farm village to an isolated villa, its gardens screened by a high rock wall. A figure at the gate snapped into sudden alertness, and at recognizing Herr Boettner, executed a salute.

"Everything ready, Scholl?" Herr Boettner demanded.

"Yes, excellency," the other answered. "I need only a few minutes in which to warm up."

Scholl ran to an old wooden shack behind the villa. A device of hidden pulleys let one end fall out. Scholl called for help in rolling out a trim French staff plane and directing it into an open field.

"She is trim and ready, excellency!" Scholl exclaimed proudly. "There's no strut or bolt I haven't checked, and there's petrol enough to put us down at Koln!"

Boettner stood guard while Scholl warmed his engine. People came out from the nearby farm village, attracted by the roaring motors. When the ship was ready, Boettner squeezed Elton into the observer's cockpit beside him. They were rolling down the grain field when Elton caught the pennants of dust, of French camions dashing madly towards them. An irregular hole appeared in their windshield, marking the path of a belated French bullet that had so narrowly missed its target. Scholl climbed rapidly out of range and set his course to the north and east.

From time to time Boettner scanned the skies behind. But if French pursuit planes were put into the air from the

frontier squadrons they failed to come within sight of their prey. The checkerboard of green and yellow fields shortly gave place to rolling hills as they reached the Vosges, then in early afternoon they came over the broad gleaming ribbon of the Rhine. Following its course they reached Koln and landed at the military field by two o'clock.

Herr Boettner stretched himself luxuriously and he stepped to the ground and turned details of refueling over to Scholl.

"It's pleasant to feel friendly soil under my heels, Herr Bodine," he said to Elton in German, "also to know that I'll see the sun rise again more than one time."

"I can well imagine how you feel, Herr Boettner," Elton answered.

The German smiled at Elton and said, "But now I can tell you, *mein herr,* that my name is not Boettner. In reality I am Captain Count Senn, Royal Wurttemburg lancers, and a nephew of the Duke of Wurttemburg."

"I'd heard that hinted," Elton responded, unimpressed, "but really consider such matters no business of mine."

"But I wanted you to know I'm no ordinary agent—what you might call a spy," the German hastened to say. "I suppose I was very foolish, but I went to Paris on a mission of peace. Now everyone will laugh at me in Berlin."

"That, also, Count Senn, is no business of mine," Elton rejoined.

"But if I had succeeded, we might have had peace before winter sets in. Alas, but there are only two men who stand in the way of an end to this war, two men who want to make impossible terms with us!"

Elton appeared wholly disinterested, and said, "My business is to see you safely in Berlin and receive any payment that may be due my superiors in Paris for our services. Beyond that, I would rather you tell me nothing of your affairs, Count Senn."

"But how am I to know you are the one to receive payment, Herr Bodine? Or even that you are representing the individual whom I have in mind?"

"Perhaps," Elton countered promptly, "if I should mention Doctor Levigne, and the Ministere de la Guerre, it would give you an inkling. If you wish, I'll be glad to set down for you the cipher key in which you communicate with our friend at the war ministry."

"That'll be unnecessary, Herr Bodine. What you've just said is sufficient."

Their conversation drifted into abstractions and pleasantries. The German was voluble after his hard confinement under the shadow of death. But there was a note about his man now that puzzled Elton. Boettner, or Count Senn, had undergone a marked change of personality. He appeared now a simple, gentle sort of person, given somewhat to altruistic dreams, the scion of a powerful family bent on indulging his own whimsical statecraft for peace even against the advice of higher German authority. Such a role seemed out of keeping with the German's cold, level eyes, his emotionless features, his whole makeup.

"You shall have the run of Berlin as my guest, Herr Bodine," the masquerader said, as if he sensed what was going on in Elton's mind. "No matter if your own motives are mercenary, I'll let you know how grateful I am for what you've done, since you represent a most noble man. If you were German you should have the Iron Cross of the second class for your intrepidity at Paris. *Ei,* but those were sharp chances you took for me, Herr Bodine!"

THEY took off an hour later for Berlin, Elton jammed in with the agent from Wurttemburg. In the open cockpit there was no conversation. Herr Boettner gave occasional instruction to his pilot through earphones as they whirred

on to Berlin. By ten o'clock they circled the Brandenburg gate and signalled for lights at the military field, then made an easy landing. The German, on identifying himself to the kommandant, was given a gray military car in which he took Elton and his pilot through the Brandenburg gate and into the great broad artery of Unter den Linden.

A band was playing at the head of a regiment of infantry, which marched in field gray, with full packs and fixed bayonets. The great street was thronged with people. And before their car had traversed half a dozen squares, Elton was conscious of a solemn, portentous drama being unfolded in front of him. Those crowds were glum, sodden, almost sullen. They were paying little or no attention to the marching troops. A second column passed, a battalion of the Imperial guards, then a squadron of cavalry.

Elton's practiced eye, his keen intuitions, gave him the unmistakable import. Those troops were marching through Berlin not as a mere martial spectacle to receive the once wild cheers of Berlin, but as a reminder of military power, a warning to the discontented populace, a threat to restless masses.

The information he had come for to Berlin. Elton felt the surge of his pulse as he checked his appraisal and verified his deductions. An unaccountable piece of good fortune that had put him into Unter den Linden at this critical moment. There are verifications to be made, but what he had seen already was of incalculable value at the Allied command posts in France. As Berlin, so Germany—and the German civil populace was cracking under the long crimson drain. It was confirmation of what his commander had suspected.

"Swine!" Herr Boettner sneered, his eyes on the grim masses behind the curbs. "*Ei, Gott,* but they are hungry enough for peace to accept even what those scoundrels Clemenceau and Foch wish to take from Germany! But we'll show them, *ja,* we'll teach them loyalty!"

Confirmation. Elton pretended not to hear, gave no indication of what he saw and understood. His part was that of a mercenary, a paid agent in the service of a French traitor, in Berlin to collect that bounty of a million francs. Safety, he knew, lay in clinging to this role in word and gesture.

"We will go to my private quarters for the night," Boettner announced, as the car turned out of Unter den Linden. "I will make you comfortable, Herr Bodine, while I make my reports, then we will finish our business together."

The military car took them to a stone residence on Kronenstrasse, a small but modern home set in a small garden. Boettner led his guest inside. An old woman servant who opened the door greeted Boettner in wooden-faced silence. At Boettner's order, Elton was shown to a small bedroom, where he was left alone. From his room, which overlooked the street, he heard Boettner's car speed away a few minutes later.

The enigma of Boettner had been growing on Elton, now filled him with a sharp restlessness. Had the German seen through his masquerade, now gone to Wilhelmstrasse to identify him? He remembered that Boettner had offered him cigarettes out of a silver case as they entered the house. Had the case been coated in minium, to record his fingerprints? In that event, Wilhelmstrasse records would promptly disclose his name and record to the Imperial secret service.

Elton felt an impulse of flight. If he made it aboard the midnight express to Koln, there would be a gambler's chance of penetrating the military frontiers beyond the Rhinelands. That spectacle he had observed in Unter den Linden, with its titanic implications, must be communicated to Allied headquarters at any cost, without delay. But a calm appraisal of his situation forged his decision to sit tight, wait on the return of Boettner, play

to the last the desperate chance he had staked his hopes of success upon.

Deliberately he set about a survey of the room for any hint he might find of the identity of the mysterious Boettner. Was the man really Count Senn, nephew of the Duke of Wurtemburg, an eccentric intellectual who had gone to France on some quixotic peace mission as he pretended? There was a single picture on the wall, that of a young woman. From the resemblance to Boettner he guessed the girl must be the German's sister. But there was no inscription.

Several books were lying on a table but without name on fly leaves. Taking care not to disarrange the contents, he ransacked the drawers of a dresser. Mostly they contained small items of feminine dress. Then he saw looking up at him a small framed tintype. It was the picture of a young officer in dress uniform, the picture of Boettner, and Elton saw that the uniform was not of Wurttemburg but of the Prussian guards. In small German script there was a brief legend. *"To my little sister—from her brother, Kurt von Falkenheyn."*

Elton's mouth twisted in a cynical smile as he replaced the tintype and closed the dresser drawer. Von Falkenheyn, the Imperial shadow, ace of German spies, an agent resourceful enough to get Allied secrets out of Allied headquarters and leave no trail behind. The enigma of Boettner no longer puzzled him. Von Falkenheyn must have guessed his game, which accounted for the change of personality, the attempt to appear in the light of a dreamer, an erratic visitor to Paris on a mission of peace. Elton's brows knotted, his mind turned not to this new sense of imminent danger, but to what purpose lay behind Von Falkenheyn's conduct in Berlin. Was he merely playing for time to establish an Allied agent's identity before springing his trap?

As if in answer to this puzzle, the door opened, two Germans in uniform came into the room with drawn Lugers. The first of them, a middle-aged officer of the Landwehr, announced their mission in a sneering drawl.

"Thank you for coming to Berlin to deliver yourself, Herr Elton," he said. "You should have known that a third visit here must be once too often!"

Elton smiled calmly at the two men behind the Lugers, the smile of a man who is prepared mentally for crises, a game show of indifference at the specter of death with which he has played hide and seek. Intuitively he knew the futility of subterfuge, the foolish emptiness of protest or denial. And, since his true identity had been unmasked, he knew that any such miracle as a forcible escape from these two officers was impossible.

"The advantages appear to be on your side," he said quietly.

One of them stepped briskly forward and disarmed him, searched his pockets carefully, abstracted the Bodine credentials. They commanded him to leave the room, one holding his arm, the other marching directly behind with ready weapon. For a brief instant Elton felt the surge of revolt, a blind impulse to pit himself against impossible odds in a last desperate attempt to complete his mission. But he fought down that madness, accepted the grim fact that it could end only in a quick blow of Prussian lead.

A moment later, as they came into the living room, the front door burst open and Von Falkenheyn stalked in. The German's eyes were distended with rage.

"What's the meaning of this scene in my residence!" he demanded of the officers.

"Your pardon, excellency, but we've just arrested an American spy," said the Landwehr officer, "and are ridding your premises of his person."

Von Falkenheyn gave an outraged snap of his fingers.

"So you accuse my own agents of being spies!" he bellowed. "You insult me,

you insult the Duke of Wurttemburg, you outrage all decent conduct by making asses of yourselves! *Himmel,* but you'll take hands off Herr Bodine, and leave my presence!"

"But excellency," protested the Landwehr officer, "you must—"

"I'll take the responsibility of my actions!" Von Falkenheyn barked. "You obey my commands or suffer the penalty!"

"*Ja wohl,* excellency," the other acceded. "But we'll make our report of what happened here and explain that it was at the orders of Count Senn, in the name of the Duke of Wurttemburg, that we turned loose a dangerous spy."

Von Falkenheyn took them to his door and slammed it after them.

"Insolent swine," Von Falkenheyn muttered, and turned gravely to Elton to explain, "There was a high officer of the secret police present when I reported to the colonel-general all that I wanted him to know of my visit to France. I was afraid they might investigate your presence here. Please accept my apologies for what happened."

"Of course," Elton said crisply.

VON FALKENHEYN poured two glasses of brandy and invited Elton to a chair. Elton sat coolly reserved, awaiting the further developments of this strange drama. Von Falkenheyn was continuing his pose as Count Senn and his effort to pass himself off as an erratic scion of the House of Wurttemburg.

"But I'm afraid you must leave Berlin at once," the German decided.

"I'm entirely at your disposal," Elton rejoined, maintaining his own role, though he knew his mask was off.

"As far as that goes, I don't care whether you're an Allied agent or who you are," Von Falkenheyn added. "My interest is in an early peace, one that both sides can accept; also to see that our mutual friend in France suffers no embarrassment by my visit to Paris.

"The message I want to send is one of good will and appreciation and to urge every effort towards a just peace, Herr Bodine. I'll get it ready for you at once."

Von Falkenheyn spent some minutes at a writing table, writing, re-writing, revising. When he finally had set down his thoughts to suit himself, he converted the message into cipher, folded the sheet of paper carefully and handed it to Elton.

The German led the way abruptly outside to where the gray military car that had brought them from the flying field was waiting.

They entered the car and drove off. Elton remained silent, his mind trying to analyze this amazing episode. What was Von Falkenheyn up to? Why the masquerade of Count Senn?

But when the car went direct to the flying field, when Elton found himself standing under the observer's cockpit of Von Falkenheyn's captured French staff plane he perceived the light behind this game, a German decision to protect their French traitor in Paris at any cost.

"A good, safe voyage, my friend, and good luck to you," Von Falkenheyn called out as Elton mounted to the cockpit.

Shortly after noon Elton sighted the gleaming towers and spires of Paris. The plane swept past the city from Provins and dropped to a precarious landing in an open field. Waiting only until his passenger was on the ground, the German pilot waved good-by and vaulted back into the skies. Walking to the village of Jouy-le-Châtel, Elton, unable to get motor transportation, telephoned to the Deuxième Bureau for a fast car and two French operatives of the Deuxième Bureau.

Finding a table in the village estaminet, Elton got out the Von Falkenheyn message. As he expected, it yielded to the key he had found in deciphering that first German message to Paris. The message turned out to be an innocuous bit of

rambling about the need of an early peace, evidently a mere subterfuge to cover the trail of the traitor of Paris:

I am writing this to advise you that
despite many embarrassments from my people
I shall continue to work for peace. But only
if M. Clemenceau and Foch are alive
to the dire needs of some concessions
can we hope to make progress. But I'm sure
in another thirty days you will
see a growing demand for an armistice,
one strong enough, I hope, that it will
be exposed in plain terms to your own government.

A study of the message convinced Elton that it was not in code. But he began a search for a cryptogram within a cryptogram, a hidden message under the cipher. First he tried all of the usual tests, deleting words in varying sequence. No result. His attention centered finally upon the sentence "But only if M. Clemenceau and Foch are alive to the dire needs of some concessions, can we hope to make progress."

An hour of work and Elton half rose from his chair under the impact of a certain discovery. Half a dozen times he checked and tested his discovery, then accepted it. He folded the paper away and went outside to wait. Von Falkenheyn's mission to Paris was now explained, Elton's own release made clear.

When the Deuxième Bureau car arrived a few minutes later, he sped into Paris, drove straight to the Ministere de la Guerre, intent on instant action. His friend Lieutenant d'Auteuil and a French sergeant had come with the car. After an hour of going from office to office and he came upon his man, a chief of the confidential secretariat in the ministry of war. A fat, squatty little man of middle age, with a bland face and a pair of large gray eyes that looked up with a disarming innocence of expression. The man, D'Auteuil advised, was M. Laubot, native Parisian, linguist, statistician, expert in ballistices.

Leaving D'Auteuil and his sergeant outside the Laubot door, Elton entered the room.

"I am a courier from Count Senn with a message for you, monsieur," he announced.

Laubot read, his eyes fixed upon the message for a long time, his face impassive. Elton read the play of Laubot's mind, his cool analysis of this unprecedented predicament. Finally Laubot decided on a game of bluff and leaped to his feet, glaring savagely.

"Why does that German lunatic waste his time sending such messages?" he demanded. "If you are his courier do you understand it is my duty to order you under arrest! If I don't do so, it's because the whole thing is so absurdly harmless. *Oui*, Count Senn should be in a lunatic asylum, monsieur!"

Elton went to the door and invited Lieutenant d'Auteuil inside, handed him a copy of the message M. Laubot had just received. D'Auteuil read, and then looked at Elton with puzzled eyes. Elton took the message back, ran his pencil through each second and third line, thus baring the Imperial cryptogram. The resultant message read:

I am writing this to advise you that
if M. Clemenceau and Foch are alive
in another thirty days you will
be exposed in plain terms to your own government.

"I think you'll agree, Lieutenant," Elton said to the now grim D'Auteuil, "that if Monsieur Laubot had put this little command into execution it would have been worth all the Imperial government intended paying him for his services. Now if you'll take monsieur in tow, I've got to make a report to my general on the state of things up in Berlin."

Murdo believed in keeping a gun loaded, all the time.

THE PILOT OF LOST CREEK

By C. F. KEARNS

IT WAS the time of the red-gold leaves and the yellowed grasses that young Murdo McPhie tried to run the chutes on Cultus River, and knew himself a fool for trying it.

A gyrating vortex on the left, creaming overfalls on the right, and a tawny-crested hump of racing waters between. Murdo grinned with all the reckless confidence of his twenty three years—a skinny, work hardened, dark eyed, wide-mouthed youngster—as he rose to his feet in the stern of his wabbling twelve footer, feeling the paddle twist in his white-knuckled grip as he forced the canoe up on the center line of froth.

He didn't make it.

A writhing waterboil spouted avidly against the canoe bottom. The frail craft was flung flat on its side and spun madly into the welter of churning overfalls that battered it out of sight in a terrific instant. Murdo let himself go limp.

No man could swim in that smother of white fury.

His lungs were bursting, his head was wooden, when he came clear. He gulped air and shattered water before he was again flung endlessly over and over. Rocks gouged his body and the lash of cross currents bruised him. He was drowning when he was shot out into the big slow eddy below the portage.

Gravel gave beneath his knees and he had life enough left to feel the ground. His elbows hit bottom and held his head up so he could breathe. After several deep breaths he was able to make shore.

His canoe was drifting, waterlogged, with the sluggish current below the chutes. He was hazily trying to decide if he had strength enough to swim out to it when a panting man pushed through the willow growth.

"Ha!" He was a shortish, black bearded butter ball of a man with moist brown eyes. "Ho! You got out, hey? Ho, I see de canoe and I—ha,—by gar! Murdo! I'm glad, me."

"All right, all right." Murdo laughed as he staved off the enthusiastic embrace of the sentimental fat man. "Don't kiss me, Frenchy. Doggone it, let go. Sure I'm all right. If you got a tent and some dry clothes handy just lead me to them."

"Sure," said Frenchy Arnette from Sunnybrae—the settlement on the railway a hundred miles south, where Murdo's widowed mother lived. "We got a good camp. I'm cooking for Bullar. He's got a rich pilgrim from New York. Oh, *beaucoup* money! You can walk yourself? No?"

"I'll run," said Murdo. "I'm cold. Out of my way, Frenchy. I'll run fast and get circulated."

THE camp stood just back from the water where the river was widest; a twelve by sixteen foot cook tent and two ten by twelves. One of the smaller tents stood beside the cook tent, for the crew. The other, a little apart, was for the pilgrim—the usual term for any big game hunter or city vacationist.

Bullar was a capable guide. There was an air of permanence to his camp, in spite of flimsy canvas. The tent frames were of saplings, neatly axed. The long table and attached benches in the cook tent were hewn smooth and the table covered with white oilcloth. A stove pipe protruded from the sloping top of each tent, and chopped firewood, dry, was stacked in ample piles. A string of lake trout, several ruffed grouse, and two quarters of venison hung on a pole outside the cook tent. The firm sand in front of the door flaps was swept clean of sticks and leaves.

As Murdo shivered by the stove the roar of an airplane came down the sky. He said:

"Another flying machine? I saw one this morning, too."

"Sure. Dat's our plane." Frenchy inspected a steaming kettle. "Oldham goes de luxe. He's got a plane and a man to fly it. Ho, de plane got a canoe beat for travel, Murdo. She save one hell of a lot hard work with a paddle and a pole. Hey?"

He poured out a black cup of coffee, shoving milk can and sugar along from the array on the table. Murdo sucked at the hot liquid gratefully. Frenchy rummaged in a blanket pile at the end of the tent.

"Here. One pair of pants, one shirt, one sweater. Moccasins. Dey fit you kind of quick, maybe." He grinned. "I t'ink you don't eat so good lately, Murdo. I count your ribs."

"Brrr." Murdo shed his wet clothes and draped his host's voluminous garments about his starved frame. "Fit me like a tent. I'll keep my belt and knife. Yeah, I'm kind of thin. The grub box got low. It's a bad habit, Frenchy. I guess your plane is landing."

Voices. Bullar came in, followed by two other men. He held out his hand to Murdo, gripping heartily. "It would be you, you fool kid. We saw you try it. Hell, don't you know any better than that?"

"Big hurry," explained Murdo meekly. Bullar was a tall, spare, grayish man of fifty-odd years; a tireless hunter, a trained woodsman. He grunted.

"Hurry? Humph! Ought to have your pants kicked."

The man with him laughed, a middle aged, portly man, about the same height as Murdo's five feet ten. His resolute eyes and spiky black mustache were framed in a reddish-brown face that had been much exposed to the weather. He moved easily. Murdo guessed he knew his way around even if he was a pilgrim. The man was smiling at him, in benign disparagement of Bullar's scolding.

"It was a stout effort, son."

Murdo began to glow. "This is Mad Murdo McPhie, Mr. Oldham," Bullar introduced them. "He runs a trap line sixty miles upstream. He's the man of his family. He ain't a bad kid, but he sure is pig-headed. Say—your ma is worrying about you. I thought she said you had gone out with a survey party for the summer?"

Murdo shook hands with Mr. Oldham, noting his firm grip.

"That's what ma thought," he told Bullar. "She is a great hand to worry about us kids." A little fair man was holding out his hand and Murdo took it.

"Mr. Flynn, my pilot," said Oldham.

"You're skinnier than I am," accused Flynn genially. "In fact, you're pretty nearly a skeleton, feller?"

"I'll bet." Murdo liked this little man instantly, but it was something of a shock to find, on looking closer, that Flynn wasn't so young. His face was pink and overlaid with tan, but his skin was full of tiny wrinkles. His fair hair was thin on top and his eyes were cold gray, as Murdo looked into them, and seemingly bottomless.

"Stay here and rest," bade Bullar. "Supper is just about ready. I'll go and get your canoe."

"Don't bother," said Murdo swiftly. "I'll get it. I'll take your canoe and—"

"Sit down." Bullar scowled. "You need a rest after going through them chutes like a dead fish. You got no right to be living a-tall. You stay here, kid."

Oldham and Flynn went out with him while Frenchy made gravy. Murdo fidgeted. He said:

"Seems a heck of a way to hunt moose. Where is the sport in shooting them from flying machines?"

"Aw," explained Frenchy, "he don't do dat. Oldham saves time by use de plane. He don't shoot much. He's got de moving picture machine. He onlee wants de extra big head or one veree fine grizzly pelt. Dey hunt on foot. Just use de plane to get dere."

When the table was set Frenchy banged on the bottom of a dish pan with a mixing spoon. Oldham and Flynn came in presently and Oldham motioned Murdo to the table. Murdo grinned widely.

"Don't mind if I do."

HE WAS half through a second helping of green vegetables smothered in butter—doubly delicious after two months abstinence—when Bullar came in. He sat down slowly, saying:

"Okay, Kid. I beached her for you. Needs some fixing. It was just floating around in the big eddy."

Before Murdo could thank him he demanded abruptly:

"What you been doing all summer?"

"Oh, just gophering around." Murdo was cautious, dodging Bullar's eyes.

"Find anything?"

"Sure." Murdo winked at Oldham and Flynn. "I hope to tell you. Mosquitoes, bulldog flies, starvation and misery. I guess the survey job would have been easier."

He stood up, but as he went out Bullar left his untasted supper. He overhauled the lad with swift strides. Murdo stopped, turning to face him.

"Sa-ay son," Bullar drawled suspiciously. "You got me wondering. What's in that bundle you got jammed in the bow? I hefted it and it seems a little on the heavy side."

Murdo gave him a dangerous glare.

Bullar grinned, stepped past the fuming youth and laid a hand on the canvas wrapped bundle in the bow of the canoe. He slipped two fingers under the thongs and lifted it out.

"Hey," warned Murdo, his voice lifting. "Lay off. Put that back!"

"What's in it," asked Bullar crisply, lifting it judicially. "It feels funny to me. Damn funny."

"Moose hide."

"Moose hide! With that weight?"

Murdo clenched his fists furiously. Drawn by the hasty exit followed by lifted voices, Frenchy and Oldham and Flynn were standing at the entrance to the cook tent. They began to stroll closer as Bullar drew his hunting knife and deliberately cut the buckskin cord around the bundle.

A stream of fine sand and coarser grains of gravel ran down on the moose hide from the punctured bag, and its color was the color of the falling poplar leaves.

Gold!

Frenchy Arnette let his breath go in a single incredulous gasp. The pilot, Flynn, whistled "Whewww!" J. P. Oldham said calmly, "Well now, that *is* interesting."

"Placer gold," pronounced Bullar, almost reverently. "Raw placer gold with rough edges. It didn't come far, that stuff. It doesn't lie deep, either. It's—Hey! Grab him!"

Murdo had been stealthily backing up. As Bullar yelled in alarm he whirled and rushed for Oldham's private tent. Bullar bounded after him but Murdo was in and out of the tent like a marten into a squirrel's nest, and like a marten, he got what he went in for.

Oldham's sporting .375 was in his hands as he came out.

"Stop!" The muzzle covered Bullar's chest.

Bullar disregarded the weapon as he leaped. Snap! The hammer fell, but the firing pin met no resistance. One of Bullar's capable hands grasped the rifle barrel, the other fell upon Murdo's bony shoulder. He heaved, and Murdo was separated from the rifle.

"Damn you!" Murdo rubbed his shoulder and his dark eyes were lurid. "If that gun had been loaded—"

"We don't keep loaded guns in my camps," growled Bullar, breathing fast. "You'd shoot a man, would you?" His lip curled and then he changed his tone significantly. "Look—I didn't mean to hurt you, kid, but you got to be reasonable. See?"

"No," snarled Murdo.

"Come, come." Oldham walked between them. His tone was conciliatory, his manner paternal. "What nonsense is this? No need to use guns. We are interested in the gold. Naturally. Anyone would be. It's getting darkish, so suppose we light a fire and smoke the pipe of peace around it. Don't be alarmed, son. After all, it *is* your gold."

Bullar grunted but took the hint and began picking up dry twigs, aided by Frenchy Arnette, who contributed an armful of stove wood. Murdo stood and smoldered. Flynn said something very low to Oldham and they walked a few paces away, their conversation guarded.

Gold!

Dry wood crackled. Saffron flames leaped. Five men stood about the little blaze.

"What were you figuring to do with that dust?" Bullar asked conversationally.

"I got dependents," retorted Murdo, sensing what lay behind Bullar's too casual query. "What do you think I was going to do with it! Go on a drunken bat, like the rest of you booze hounds? All money means to you is a headache and little green snakes crawling all over the cabin walls."

"Huh!" snorted the scandalized Frenchy Arnette. "W'at do you know about it? A man has the great pleasurement getting dat way. He don't worry

about dem pretty little green snakes."

"Look here." Oldham squatted comfortably with most of his weight on one foot, doubled beneath him. "I've just been thinking this thing over." He held a burning twig to his pipe, puffing leisurely. "How about us forming a little syndicate, a company, so to speak? If this little placer find looks at all promising we might get somewhere."

"That's a good idea," approved Flynn warmly, watching Murdo. "You don't get anywhere mining by yourself."

The silence of Bullar and Frenchy was eloquent acquiescence.

"Hell with you," stated Murdo grimly. "You don't fool me. I don't want any partners. I got things to do with what gold I can dig up. I got a couple of kid brothers that are going to get some of the chances I didn't get. I got a sister who wants to marry a friend of mine who had been carrying the yoke for his family so long that he's got used to it. Huh! Maybe they can't use a few dollars. I'll stake ma to that trip to see her folks back in Vermont, too. Partners! Don't make me laugh. I can use it all myself."

"You're a fine guy," accused Bullar bitingly. "Here you talk selfish like that and you wearing some of Frenchy's clothes right now. Don't hold out on us. Where is this placer ground?"

"Yeah," said Flynn, and his voice had a knife in it. "Where?"

"There is," suggested Oldham smoothly, rising to his feet, "such a thing as being reasonable."

The silence was tremendous.

"I KNOW what you mean," said Murdo finally. "You don't say so, but you mean it just the same. You think you can bluff me—or force me—into telling you where I got that stuff. Now listen: after I record that discovery claim of mine the whole world will know where it is located. You got the same chance as everybody else. You got a better chance. You got a plane. You can get in first."

"Thanks." Oldham smiled in the firelight. He kicked the brands closer with the brown toe of an expensive hunting boot. "We have a plane, true," he conceded dryly. "It might even be possible for us to beat you to the nearest recording office. I think we should continue the discussion."

"I don't," said Murdo coldly.

Bullar reached out impulsively for Murdo's thin throat, but stayed his hand. He whirled and stepped a few paces to where the moose hide lay. He seized a corner and dragged it within the firelight's glow. He hefted the canvas sack again so that more of the yellow sand spilled in shimmering rivulets on the fleshed-white inner surface of the hide.

"Placer gold," said Bullar gloatingly. "Clean raw placer gold! As good as any that ever came out of the Klondyke. I was there. I know. A hundred years ago the Hudson's Bay men wrote in their books that there was rich placer diggings in this country, but no white man ever found it—until now. Here's the proof. Twenty pounds of clean gold. I'm just guessing at the weight. Maybe ten thousand dollars worth.

"Look, kid." The man's voice grew husky with emotion; the intense passion of greed. "Don't fool with us. You come back with us and show us where you dug this up. We'll do the right thing by you. But we're partners in this—right now and sudden."

"You'll get the chance to stake next to discovery," repeated Murdo, "after I have recorded my claim. But I got the pick, and don't you forget it."

"We won't forget it," whispered Flynn.

Like that! Murdo stepped back a little from the fire but Bullar kept pace with him. Gold! It had fired these men. They were no longer the neighbors, the friends he had known. Gold had changed

them. They wanted some of it. Some of his gold.

A cold fear grew on him because he knew that was not the full truth. These men wanted *all* his gold.

"Hey," he protested to Oldham, whose face was a brown study in the fireglow. "What are you doing, mister? You're a rich man. Are you siding in with these wolverines? Are you going to let them gyp me out of what I've sweated and starved for? Hey? You got lots or you wouldn't be flying a plane on a big game hunt. Hey?"

"Yes," said Oldham gently, "I have lots of money—from your perspective. And yet—" He smiled, tamping the tobacco in his pipe bowl. "I rather think, Mr. McPhie, we have you compromised."

The word didn't seem right to Murdo. He wasn't sure what it meant, but he knew what Bullar and Oldham and Frenchy and this grim little Flynn meant. They meant to keep the gold he had laboriously dug up these past months, and they meant to find out where he had dug it.

They were all watching him. Flynn had his hand in his pocket. On a gun, sure. Bullar was fast, old as he was. Frenchy Arnette was no slouch. Neither was Oldham.

"Hell with you," cried Murdo. He bounded across the fire between Oldham and Flynn, his foot scattering embers as he went. He ducked low as he ran hard for the gloom of the brush behind the tents: the sanctuary of timbered darkness.

A shot cracked. Flynn's revolver. Men swore and feet pounded behind. But he had moccasins that made little sound. He was in the shelter of the brush and he moved fast, wriggling like a hunted animal in thick cover. The pursuit died behind, as he knew it must.

He circled and came out on the river bank a quarter mile below the camp. The stream was slow, and sluggish below the pool, in contrast to the torrent at the chutes. He saw them around the fire again, crawled close enough to be sure that there were four men present, and edged as near as he dared.

BULLAR was talking. His voice rose and rumbled but Murdo could not distinguish the words. Oldham's arm moved as he gestured but Bullar's voice was uppermost. Murdo had little difficulty in construing Bullar's plan. It was the logical thing to do.

They would start from Murdo's cabin and backtrack him. Bullar had a nose and an eye like an Indian. They could fly over the creeks and look for signs of his digging, of fresh gravel and sluice boxes, for dams on the shallows.

Sadly Murdo concluded they had an excellent chance of being successful. A man can't placer very well without leaving signs of his work.

What made it so tough was that they could find his workings and still beat him to the nearest recording office at Sunnybrae. The only road was the river. A man without a boat was out of luck. Even if he did have a canoe, a hundred miles in slow water was a lot of paddling. They could still beat him. They could fly to any one of a half dozen other recording offices, for that matter. A plane went fast.

A gas lantern lit up the camp area and Murdo felt as though he was caught in the daylight. Then he remembered he was on the outside looking in and stood still, close by a spruce trunk. There was a touch of frost in the air and it was cold standing still. He saw men go down to the plane. They picked up the canoe, a light basswood model like Murdo's, but new, and under Flynn's directions it was clamped firmly underneath the fuselage of the plane, bottom side down.

They were going to move. Murdo felt a sudden surge of hope that faded when

Bullar picked up an axe. A few short sharp strokes and Murdo's canoe would never float again; it was a mass of splintered firewood.

"That disposes of him," he heard Bullar say brutally.

They returned to the fire, hanging the gas lantern on a limb so that it cast an illumination on the space between the plane and the tents. Murdo, torn with curiosity, strained his ears. An argument seemed to be in progress. Bullar's voice rose once.

"No," he stated coldly. "Frenchy stays here. He—"

The rest was lost. Frenchy was to stay! That meant he was to watch the camp—with a gun—while the rest of them went off in the plane.

Murdo had no doubt whatever where they were going.

He toyed with the idea of calling to them, of making an offer. But the words stuck in his throat. There had been a look in those cold deep eyes of the little pilot, Flynn, that was like the gray of a winter-gripped mountain lake, and no warmer. There had been a total lack of emotion in the face or the voice of the man from New York. Bullar and Frenchy Arnette were like two strangers. It was as if Murdo had never met them, never known the men they had been.

There was a lump in his throat and his eyes were hot. It wasn't fair. It wasn't right. They had his placer gold, that he had toiled a summer, alone, to get. They had smashed his canoe. If they had left him that . . .

A single audacious thought jerked him eagerly alive, trembling. If he only could!

But he dismissed that chance as hopeless. One man was sitting on guard beside the fire with a rifle. It would be impossible to get their canoe off the plane, and launch it right side up without noise.

Regretfully Murdo decided that plan was out.

But the thought persisted. And, thinking of the canoe, he knew what to do. It was a long chance, but better than no chance at all.

"I'm up Lost Creek," he muttered to himself, as a man will who is used to solitude. "I got to get myself out. There's a boat out there and I'm going to use it."

He faded into the cover of the timber.

THREE hours later, naked and shivering but with his clothes balanced on his head, Murdo waded gingerly upstream, neck deep in the cold water. The fire had burned to a dull glow and no figures sat beside it, but he had no doubt keen ears listened within the tents and that somebody peered out from time to time. There was no moon and the stars were dim. He would have liked them dimmer. The gas lantern lit the shore portion of the plane so that the beach between it and the camp could hide no one.

Murdo reared up cautiously in the shelter of the pontoons, under the canoe lashed beneath the fuselage. Risky stuff, but Lost Creek was a risky proposition for any man. He put his clothes bundle down on a pontoon, the one in the shadow of the canoe, and set cautiously to work with his knife.

He probed the side of the canoe until the keen blade slid through the thin basswood and balked at the tough ribs. These were a slower task and the numerous nails were a problem; but, persisting, he was finally able to remove a small section from the side of the rear portion of the canoe: the part furtherest from the tent and on the hidden side, slightly above the flat bottom. This section he carefully put inside the canoe.

The hand that held the knife ached with the strain, as did his arm. There was sweat on his forehead and his heart thumped as though he had run a long distance. But his body from the waist down was frozen. The Cultus River was cold!

He carefully felt on the pontoons for any telltale shaving or splinters, decided there were none, and squeezed in through the hole head first. It was a difficult effort to accomplish without noise or splashing. He was able to lean far enough inside to grasp a thwart and for some seconds his entire weight was on one hand as he gradually forced his shoulders and upper body through the opening until he could wriggle and squirm his full length inside.

"Rat in a trap," he thought grimly. "Good thing I'm skinny. Now I got to get this shirt and pants on. I won't feel so scared then."

He was gambling that Oldham's crew would leave at dawn. They would probably not notice the hole in the canoe bottom unless they looked specifically for something of the sort before entering the enclosed cabin. Whoever stayed behind to guard the camp would probably see the hole in the canoe as the plane took off, but would not be able to attract the pilot's attention.

Murdo hoped not. Most fervently he hoped not.

His surmise was correct. Voices at breakfast came to him as he shivered in the narrow shell. They came out as light filtered in between the canoe gunwales and the bottom of the fuselage. Flynn was snappish and Bullar's voice rumbled in bellicose reply. Murdo grinned at that. The leaven of gold was beginning to work. Bullar as a hired employee was a different Bullar to the co-partner in lawless affairs.

Flynn climbed lightly to the cabin. The starter whined and the motor caught. The floats were shoved clear and two men climbed aboard. Oldham and Bullar, no doubt. Frenchy would be left on guard. Flynn took off down the river with his lusty radial roaring full-throated defiance to the lonely lands.

"Lucky," murmured Murdo. "I'm just plain lucky."

Thirty minutes of flight in the crisp morning air and the motor fell into a spluttering discordancy. Murdo ceased to shiver. The plane would land at his cabin—Bullar knew its location—and the quest would start from there. Perhaps they had already seen something suspiciously like placer diggings or the scars of his prospecting.

Gliding. The floats splashed, the plane jarred and tossed. Fast water and broken. Murdo knew where they were, just below his cabin and as near as the plane could conveniently land.

He drew a deep breath. Flynn was taxiing for the shore with short bursts of acceleration from his motor. Murdo slid out feet first, pushing with his flat palms. He splashed into the roily stream between the pontoons and stayed under water until he could stay down no longer.

He didn't look back as he came up but he swam furiously for the familiar shore. The engine thundered close, the wail of the propellor was in his ear. He let himself sink and felt the shadow of the skimming plane above his head. He swam across the current hard and when he came up the shore was at hand and the plane was a hundred yards down river, but turning again.

He gave Flynn credit for being fast, in that moment. The pilot must have noticed him drop from the canoe, somehow, and had turned his plane, full motor on instantly. If the floats had hit the swimmer . . .

"Twisty hound," muttered Murdo angrily. "Tried to drown me. Good thing he couldn't back up or I'd be drifting down Lost Creek right now. Wait, damn you, wait! I'll talk to you birds across my sights."

The plane came full out for the shore as he clawed free of the water. He ran frantically, trusting that Bullar had no rifle with him. He did not fear Flynn's revolver, as he had nearly a hundred yards start. But he knew Bullar and

Flynn would be on his trail as soon as the floats ran up on the sand.

His cabin was facing the stream, half hid in a spruce clump. He hit the door full speed with his shoulder as he grabbed at the draw string. It flew inwards and feverishly he clutched the canvas and blanket covered rifle that hung by wires from the ceiling. He stripped off the covering and sprang outside. His thumb drew back the hammer.

Murdo believed in keeping a gun loaded, all the time, when a man was alone. He was glad of it now.

FLYNN and Bullar were running hard, Flynn slightly in the lead. The little man had a revolver in his hand but Bullar was apparently unarmed. Murdo stepped out and brandished the rifle.

"Hey! Ease off."

Flynn's reply was a shot from the waist that plunked into the cabin walls. Too close. Murdo clamped his lips as he aimed at the pilot's belt buckle. He couldn't miss at that range. But he dropped the rifle muzzle a split second before he fired.

Flynn went down as though smitten by a thunderbolt and the racing Bullar catapulted headlong over him, sprawling in a dazed heap less than twenty yards from Murdo's feet. For an instant both men lay supine and the only sound was a metallic click as Murdo levered a fresh cartridge into the firing chamber.

Flynn got up, on his knees first, and then to his feet. Both hands were empty and both of them hung by his side. He weaved as he stood, then he began to walk toward Murdo. Blood dripped from his right hand.

"Steady, you," growled Murdo warningly. "Stand there until I see what I'm going to do with you. Get up, Bullar."

Bullar was on one knee, dazed. At Murdo's terse command he lurched to his feet. He felt his jaw with both hands.

"Think I broke my neck."

"No such luck." Flynn disregarded the warning as he staggered forward. "You win, kid. I'm dumb—the plane handled heavy and I didn't know why. Your cards are all aces."

"Hands up, both of you," ordered Murdo coldly. "And if you come any closer, Flynn, I'll stop you permanent."

Bullar's hands shot high. Flynn grinned a wry, twisted, somehow unhostile sort of a grimace. "I said you win. You needn't worry about me. You hit me in the right arm, and my left wrist is broken, I think, where this cursed clumsy hick knocked me sideways and stepped on my arm at the same time. Anyhow I can't move it."

He stopped, swaying, and the pallor of his face was apparent. Murdo snapped, "Turn your back, Bullar, and take fifty steps toward the river. Count 'em. There. Stay there. Don't look this way. If you do I'll let daylight through you and I don't mean maybe."

Murdo set the gun against the cabin. "Let me look at those arms," he said. "I aimed at your legs."

"Yeah," said Flynn listlessly, as he slumped down with his back against the cabin wall. "Fell before you fired. I hit the ground before the bullet hit me. What does it matter? I'm—I'm—give me a drink."

His head lolled. Blood dripped from his arm. Murdo drew his knife and cut the sleeves off below the shoulders. He looked at the wound in the left arm, shot a quick glance at Bullar and dived inside the cabin. He was out again instantly with a screw top jar and a tin pail.

"First aid," he told the fainting pilot. "Hey, Bullar." He threw the tin bucket. "Pick that up and get some water. If you got any snake bite medicine on the plane, bring it. And don't try any funny stuff. Your flying man is hurt bad."

Bullar went off at a run and Murdo sprinkled boracic powder on the ruddy gash that traversed Flynn's forearm.

"Gosh," he marveled dismally.

"Missed the bone. Good thing, too. You wouldn't have any arm left. Those soft nosed shells sure raise hob. Just made raw meat of that arm as it is." He wrapped a length of gauze bandage around it roughly. "This stuff is clean." He dashed inside the cabin again. "Flour sacks. Clean and washed. Got to stop that blood somehow."

He had the arm bandaged when Bullar came running, blown and crimson of face. He held a flask in his hand. "Oldham's Demerrara rum. Strong stuff." He set the water pail down, half-empty.

"Thanks," said Murdo. "Just stand back there where I can watch you." Oldham was following Bullar at a fast walk. "Tell him to hold up too." He waited, his hand close to the rifle until Bullar retreated. A thought struck him. "Pick up that revolver and throw it in the river. Right now. You heard me."

Bullar searched in the sparse grass, located the weapon and carried out instructions. He walked to the river bank and Murdo grunted as the hand gun glinted in the sun before it sank with a splash, thrown well out. He took his eyes off Bullar and Oldham then as he held the flask to Flynn's lips.

Flynn caught his breath sharply as he swallowed. He swallowed again, slowly. Then he shook his head slowly.

"Ahhh!"

Murdo replaced the cork. "Hey, Bullar."

Bullar came to him, alone.

"His left arm is broken. You get busy and put a split on it."

"Okay." Bullar probed the break with experienced fingers. "Sure is broke. I'm sorry, Flynn."

"What odds?" whispered the pilot. "Where do we go from here? Give me a smoke!"

IT WAS suddenly ominously quiet on the banks of the Cultus River, thirty miles above the chutes, where the current ran fast on the riffles and the gravel bars lay bare. It was a narrow valley, sloping off gently to high lands in the east, but westward a mountain range lifted an abrupt barrier whose top was serrated with snow capped peaks. Bullar whistled eerily between his teeth as he selected a straight thin spruce stick from the woodpile. He split the stick lengthways with his knife and shaved it smooth.

"I need some bandage," he said calmly.

"Find some inside," said Murdo, just as quietly, watching them all, his hand not far from the rifle leaning against the wall. Flynn was suffering, tight lipped, his eyes half closed. Oldham stood watching him with concern writ plain on his features. Something in his expression shocked Murdo, because there was no pity in the man's eyes. He was fuming with annoyance. Murdo felt a cynical humor in the situation. He chuckled briefly.

"So you're stuck, Mr. Oldham? Who's going to fly you back to civilization?"

Oldham took a cigar out of the breast pocket of his pigskin windbreaker and savagely bit off the end. Bullar came out of the cabin tearing a piece of blanket into long strips. He said:

"Give me a hand here, somebody."

Murdo did not move. Oldham stepped forward and Bullar showed him silently where to hold the splints. Then Bullar gave Flynn's hand a quick pull and the pilot groaned. Still holding, Bullar rapidly wound the strips of cloth around the splints with his free hand.

"Not much, but it will do." He shook his head. "It's got to do, for now."

"Well," snapped Oldham impatiently, "this is a hell of a note. Now I suppose we have to take him downstream to a doctor—by canoe?"

The question was for Bullar, but his eyes were on Murdo. Murdo grinned.

"Just who do you suppose is going in that canoe? You and Bullar and Flynn? It won't hold more than three."

Oldham opened his mouth, thought

better of it, and flung the cigar away, still unlit. Flynn groaned. Bullar said sadly:

"He's got to get to a doc right away. That's a bad wound in his arm. The blood is oozing out. That needs a man with a needle and thread and some experience. He'll bleed to death or get blood poisoning. It's bad, Mr. Oldham."

Bullar had lost his leadership. Something was over-riding the lust for gold; for finding where the gold lay. For the moment concern for Flynn's welfare brought Bullar back to his status of a hired guide, responsible, by the ethics of the profession, for the safety of the party in his charge.

Murdo said, "He's up Lost Creek."

"Up Lost Creek," agreed Bullar grimly. "That canoe trip will be two or three days, counting the portage. That's two or three days too long."

"Give me another drink," begged Flynn weakly.

"Have some water," said Bullar. "Go easy on that stuff. It heats the blood. I'll make a fire. You got coffee, kid?"

"Tea," said Murdo, "and some jerked moose. Wait, Bullar. One drink won't hurt him. Here." He held the flask to the pilot's mouth. "Swallow that slow. Let it trickle down. Now listen—Flying Man."

"I'm listening," said Flynn harshly.

"You want me to fly you to Rupert?"

Flynn craned his neck to look up. "Can you fly?"

"I dunno." Murdo's grin came and went; furtive, embarrassed. "I got caught in a blizzard for four days once with nothing to read but how to be a pilot in six lessons. Doggone, when I got through with the questions and answers I sure knew that book by heart. Yeah?"

There was no sound except Flynn's deep indrawn breath. He drew in his feet and arched his back. Bullar reached down, took his shoulders and set him lightly on his feet.

Flynn's thin hair was plastered low on his forehead, his face was sickly pale, but his icy eyes were smoking. Murdo nodded his head.

"I never been in a plane but I know how they are put together from aileron to tailskid. It was all printed out clear in the book."

"Ahhh—" Hope flared and faded in Flynn's drooping gaze. "You couldn't do it. It's too risky."

"Risky!" Murdo grinned, eyes wide, showing his even teeth. "Risky! Lost Creek is risky, Flying Man. Damn risky! You're up that creek right now and you got no paddle. You got a leaky boat and the white water is close. Listen, Flynn, you got to get to hell out of here and I'm telling you. Ask Bullar. You need a doctor and the plane is the only way to get one. You can't stand a two, three day trip in a canoe. You're bleeding now and I got a bale of stuff on that arm."

FLYNN chewed his lips. "I—I taught a fellow to fly in an hour once, but he was keen." He seemed to be arguing with himself. "And I had my hands free. I—I—ah, what's the use? It doesn't make sense."

"Look," argued Murdo confidently. "I know all about holding her down until you got flying speed and then taking off gradual. I know not to let it swerve either way. I savvy how you use the stick and the rudder. I—aw—you holler in my ears and trust me. Let me feel that stick once and I'll fly you out. I'll do what you tell me. See?"

Flynn said a single word beneath his breath; no blasphemy, but a prayer.

"Why not?" insisted Murdo. "I'm no pilot, but I've been up Lost Creek myself. You got to take chances if you want to get out of it."

"Why?" asked Flynn, almost indifferently. "Why do you want to kill yourself?"

"Well," said Murdo flatly, "I'll tell

you. I don't like to see anything or anybody suffer. That's why I use quick-kill traps on my line. You're suffering. I don't like to see it. It will be worse tomorrow. See?"

Flynn said nothing but his eyes were the eyes of a trapped coyote; unafraid, knowing no law save the survival of the fittest, yet fearful.

"I—I kind of like you, too," Murdo said. He had trapped the brush wolves. "You're a tough guy and you were going to give me a dirty deal, but I'm not thinking about that. You had nerve enough to keep coming when I had a gun in my hands and I'm glad I didn't kill you. I don't want you to die on my account. See?"

"No reason to get blood poisoning," disputed Oldham suddenly. "We have a first aid kit at the camp. For that matter you can get hot water here in a few minutes. You will be all right, Flynn."

"Yeah," Bullar hastily acquiesced. "Sure. We'll fix you up. And then we—"

"Is that so?" Murdo's right arm shot out and the rifle leaped into his hands. "You sing a different song all of a sudden, Bullar. You acted real human for a minute just now. Figure you can hold things up a little while and locate my workings, eh? Don't matter much to you and this man that's paying you wages if Flynn takes too big a chance, does it? *You* haven't got most of the meat shot off your arm. Hey. You know what? Me and this Mr. Flynn are flying to Rupert, right now. It's not more than two hundred miles right over those mountains."

Flynn protested peevishly. "I can't use my hands. No. No!"

"Take his shoulders," said Murdo suddenly, the gun muzzle waving in a cogent arc. "One on each side. Steady him. You—Bullar. Move, Oldham. Get going."

"Where?" asked Bullar, but his arm and hand steadied the pilot.

"To the plane," said Murdo crisply. "Take him over while I chuck these wet pants and shirt. I got some dry clothes inside. They are pretty well used up, but anyhow they'll be dry. Keep moving. I won't be far behind you."

It was a matter of a hundred and fifty yards, but the trip was an ordeal for Flynn. At the river's edge he said as Murdo overhauled them:

"You're a game kid—but . . . it won't work. We'll both go west."

"You're telling me?" Murdo's mouth was a thin line. "Get him inside, you fellows. Not in the driver's seat. That's where I'm going to sit."

It was accomplished in silence save for a low, involuntary groan from Flynn, who could not entirely protect his wounded arms. Murdo motioned for Oldham and Bullar to come down again.

"Unclamp that canoe and then ease these floats off when I get aboard," he instructed tersely. "After we get the engine started you can shove it around so that it is pointed down stream. Savvy? And don't try any funny stuff unless you want a .30-30 slug through you. I'm not fooling. See?"

They saw. Bullar shook his head at the madness. Oldham seemed puzzled and perplexed. Murdo caught him interrogating Bullar with his eyes, his eyebrows raised meaningly and answered the unspoken question.

"Naw, I'm not dippy, Oldham. I guess you think I am, but I'm not. I'll leave you the canoe. You may need it!"

He climbed into the cabin warily. The front seats were side by side. He took the flask out of his hip pocket, removed the cork and held it to Flynn's lips. The pilot drank in tiny, slow, grateful sips. Murdo held the bottle until he saw a trace of color show on Flynn's pallid cheeks.

"SHOW me how this works," he said quietly. "I know all the names. I pull back like this on the stick to make the nose come up. I hold it in the middle

to keep the machine level. I shove it ahead to make the nose go down. I don't do any of those things in a hurry and I don't jerk or move it very far. I can feel the wind resistance when I am doing it. I don't want to turn too flat. Look. I'll do all these things easy. I'll keep her nose on the horizon. Same as the book says. Show me how to work this self-commencer and we will go someplace."

Flynn shook his head and groaned. "No."

"Yes," said Murdo, watching the two men on the shore. "Listen, Flynn. "You're a yellow coward, for all your tough ways. You got some nerve but not enough. Maybe it's because you don't feel so good. You're scared to die, feller, and so am I. But—you're up Lost Creek and I'm the guy that can show you how to get out. I'm your prop, feller. You got to lean on me. Hey?"

"No," protested Flynn shivering. "I'll take the canoe. I'll be all right. I'll—"

"Bleed to death before we get to your camp. Here, have some more of this bug-eye. It'll pick you up until you tell me what I want to know."

Flynn drank. He shivered. He said, haltingly:

"That's the starter. You got to spin it. Pull back that throttle just a hair. The spark too. No, the other lever. See that thing by your foot? Tail plane adjustment. Wind it forward a couple of turns. Look—don't let her swing. Put your feet on those rudder bars and push the other way if it starts. Pull the throttle on all the way when I tell you and hold the nose level. She will climb fast enough. See. All right, go quick! Quick, or I'll—I mean—"

"You mean you'll crack," said Murdo to himself. "This motor is warm. It will start easily." He fumbled for the starter and the motor leaped into spluttering life. Flynn's eyes were filming. Murdo waved his hands to Bullar and Oldham. They waded into the water and began to turn the plane around on its floats, so that the nose faced down stream where the river was straight for a long mile down the narrow valley.

"When I say so, pull it back all the way," barked Flynn, lifting his head. "Shove that stick forward a little more. There. Hold it there. See that air speed needle in front of you? Don't let it go below a hundred. Don't try to turn. Just keep your knees straight the way you got them now. The propeller will bring it around enough in time. Shove that stick ahead more. There. Keep it there. *Keep it there!* Never mind the pressure when we start. *Keep it there!*"

"I get you," said Murdo calmly.

"Now," screamed Flynn in his ear. "Pull it open. All the way. Now."

The spluttering became a synchronizing roar and the plane began to forge ahead. A force seemed to be trying to wrest the control stick from Murdo's fingers but he resolutely strove to hold it in the place Flynn had ordered. The rudder bars were firm against his feet. Gosh! He hadn't asked Flynn anything about the ailerons. Didn't matter, probably. The trees on shore were flying past. There was a bump.

"Hold her. *Hold her!*" Flynn's anguished prayer came from miles away, faint above the clamor of the engine. "We're off!"

Flying! Murdo bit his lips and tried to think of all the things he had to do. Of all the things he had read. Of what Flynn had just told him. It wasn't much. All he had to do was to hold his controls where they were. They were in the air. They were over the trees. He could see the air speed needle. It was just over a hundred. They were swinging a little to the right. He stole a quick glance at Flynn. The little man had slumped in his seat. Unconscious.

"Gosh," said Murdo McPhie.

He was flying. He was flying a plane by himself! There was a pressure against the stick in his palm, there was pressure

against the balls of his moccasined feet where the rudder bar rested. There was an unevenness in the plane's flight; a wabble, a flutter. He didn't know what it was. He wished Flynn would wake up again. It was awful feeling so lonesome.

"Doggone," whispered Murdo. "I'm scared. I'm good and scared. I'm up Lost Creek. That air speed says a hundred but the nose shouldn't keep swinging. We'll hit that mountain. Wonder if I can push a little on this foot? There—it's stopped swinging! Maybe if I push a little harder—*oooooohh!*—Come back—there!"

He had changed the direction slightly so that he was heading down the valley away from the high mountains. He could make the plane go where he wanted it to! The air speed was dropping to ninety. He pushed a little harder on the stick. It went up fast, too fast. Pull it back a little, just a trifle, just a hair. So.

Murdo drew a deep breath. There wasn't any wabble any more. The plane rode smoothly, like a canoe in quiet water. The roar of the motor was a steady even sound. As long as he kept his feet firm on the rudder bar, the stick shoved a little ahead, the plane stayed on a course. He saw the altimeter said five thousand.

IT WAS getting cooler. Rupert was two hundred miles west across the mountains. West? He looked at the compass. Southwest.

Got to get it around a little. Left foot on the rudder a little harder. There. A little more. Slowly, slowly, the nose of the plane swung to the west.

Hold her. West for Rupert. Two, three hours away. He was high now. No fear of hitting the mountains. Gosh! Did they look like that? This was better than climbing them on snowshoes, with a pack.

"Rupert or bust," said Murdo joyfully. "I'm not so scared as I thought I would be."

It was something that a man never anticipated, sitting at the controls of a machine of wood and steel that clove through the crisp air like a bird. The odd clouds were familiar. He had often looked down at them from the peaks.

Time passed eloquently.

"North," croaked a voice in his ear. "North!"

Slowly Murdo turned the plane, while Flynn shivered. He yelled, and nodded his head violently. Murdo held his feet firm. The plane ceased to turn.

No more mountains. A long flat . . . it was the sea. The broken land was islands. There was smoke going into a silver sky. The many smokes of Rupert.

Murdo took one hand off the stick. He put his hand in his hip pocket and found the flask. There wasn't much in it. He twisted the hard rubber cap off in his teeth and extended the bottle. Flynn found it with his lips.

When he pushed it away with his tongue the bottle was empty. Murdo put it back in his pocket. He could see the outline of the streets of Rupert, the wharves, the shipping in the harbor. Flynn was yelling:

"Throttle down. Throttle down! Shove that throttle shut."

The throttle? Oh, yes. Firmly, Murdo pushed it shut.

The abrupt silence was terrifying.

"Shove your nose down," screamed Flynn. "Down, the nose! Put your stick ahead. Quick! Quick—oh, you damn—"

Murdo shoved the stick ahead and the nose dropped. The engine popped irregularly. He could hear Flynn plainly now. The little man was almost hysterical.

"Be careful now. Do as I say. Glide at a hundred. I'll tell you when to land. You scared hell out of me with those flat turns. Don't try to turn! Don't do anything but what I tell you. Wind that wheel at your side back two turns. There. Keep pushing on that stick. We'll land in the harbor."

Murdo watched the city of Rupert swim up to them and saw the height needle drop to six, five, four, thousand feet. Everything was getting more distinct. Flynn was cursing him savagely. Murdo looked at him obliquely and saw the tears running down the wounded airman's face.

Murdo was too interested to be frightened.

Lower. Lower. Flynn was muttering brokenly, fiercely looking ahead. He snapped suddenly:

"Ease back on that stick."

Murdo did so, gently.

"Snap off those switches. Both of them. Snap them off. Damn you—move!"

Murdo snapped the switches. The silence was absolute then. No motor noise. Just the keening of the wind against their passing.

"You're going to land," said Flynn evenly, but tense as a marble statue, his eyes starkly fearful. "Hold your rudder where it is. Pull back a little on your stick to bring the nose up. A little more—now! Hold her—hold—

"Pull it back to your belly. All the way! Quick. Quick! Keep it there."

They lit—smack! And bounced, tossing a wing down. They lit again, wavered from side to side and the stick was flabby in Murdo's hand. Flynn shut his eyes, shuddering.

"We're here," said Murdo, finding himself surprised. "We're here!"

"Yeah," said Flynn. "Cigarettes in my shirt pocket. See if you can give me one. Lighter on one end of the case."

He sucked at the tobacco while Murdo held the lighter flame. Took a deep, deep breath and let the smoke filter luxuriously through his nostrils. He turned to Murdo and his eyes were bright and warm.

"You made it, kid. You went to ten thousand and you got over the mountains. I never thought you would. I should have known you might." He paused. "I used to see you every time I shaved—twenty years ago."

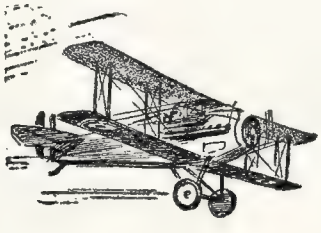
Murdo did not know what to say. A small tug was coming down wind to them. Flynn was talking.

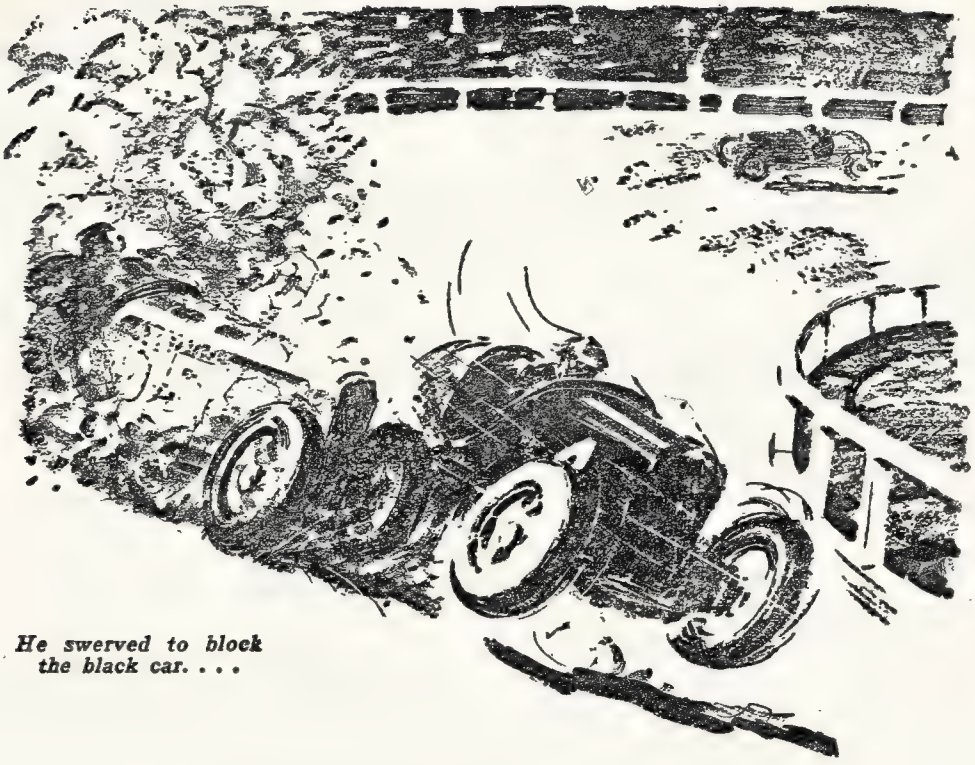
"Your gold is under the back seat, all of it. I'll have to get a man to fly in for Oldham. I—I was a little batty back there, kid. We all were."

"Sure," agreed Murdo, standing up. "I guess these fellows want to tow us in. We'll get you to a hospital. We'll send somebody for Oldham. Bullar will take him back to camp in the canoe after he patches it up. I got to record my claim first."

"I think I'd kind of like to learn to fly. Properly. Say . . . suppose I stake you fellows along discovery? Bullar and Frenchy are friends of mine. Sure, I got the pick of the ground, but you never know. Your claims might be worth—

"Hey? Hey Flynn! Aw shucks! Don't faint on me again. I was just saying—"





He swerved to block the black car. . . .

TOUGH CORNER

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

THE pits were jammed with frantic young men. They were ripping apart fast racing cars on last minute inspirations which were sure to make them hotter.

Motors roared like urgent drums. A whiff of burnt castor oil, as provocative as the smell of gunpowder, drifted on the air. The puffy northwesterly breeze lifted high a swirl of dust from skidding tires.

Aloof amidst all this activity big Jim Wallace sat heavily on the back cushion of his convertible parked just behind the pits, and waited with grim patience. He had on what his employees called his firing face. Once in a while he gnawed at his gray mustache.

At long intervals his crisp blue eyes swerved with some approval to a maroon speedster, numbered "5" in staring white letters, that was turning the half mile track with thunderous zeal. But for the most part he watched the entrance to the infield like a lion watching an antelope run.

It was long before his patience won him the sight of a big black open truck. Groaning in low gear it emerged from the sunken road under the track. On it rode black Number 4, a lithe looking racing machine.

Jim Wallace slid out of his car and ploughed through the busy pits. His elbows took jolts in plenty, but the husky president of the Wallace Motor Products Company never noticed them. In the crowds he was unnoticed by the two men aboard the truck.

Tom Riker, the yellow-headed, red-

eved driver, supported himself by long arms spread along the rail of the truck. He looked over the broad dirt oval with a mournful and distrusting visage. An awkward looking young man in repose, he looked even worse when he yawned voluminously.

"Somehow I don't feel lucky today, Ben," he said to his mechanic. "I'm not much good on these flat half milers."

"Why, hell, Tom!" said Ben, squat and well-greased, in most explosive encouragement. "You'll clean 'em like they were pushing kiddie cars. Like you always used to. Ain't you last year's champion?"

Listening, Jim Wallace clamped his jaws shut and snorted. "Buttercup!" he snarled and with a thrust of his shoulder knocked a gawking spectator out of his way.

Just then the maroon car, with the driver braking violently, scuffed to a halt near the truck. Cliff Arnold, the smiling pilot of this machine, slid down his goggles. "How is she revving, Tom?" he called.

"Rotten!" Tom shouted back.

Cliff Arnold shook his broad, red helmetted head in sympathy, opened up again and roared away down the stretch.

Suddenly the mechanic Ben caught sight of Jim Wallace.

"Anyhow, Tom," Ben said hastily, "you got a Wallace Accello on your carbureter."

Tom Riker shuddered visibly. "That's another thing!" he growled, ignoring Ben's covert but frantic signals. "If ever a gadget choked the gas flow through an intake manifold that Accello is it! What's all the coughing for, Ben?"

Ben cut off his cough abruptly. Muttering something he got busy with the planks to roll the black car off the truck.

Jim Wallace caught Riker's eye.

"The coughing's a tip-off to quit knocking the Accello when I'm around!"

Tom glanced down at him; then jumped off the truck.

"That Accello thing is all wrong even if you did invent it," he said. "Maybe it does improve the mixture but it also clogs up the manifold. And in a racing job what you've got to have is gas—lots of it—right under your throttle foot."

Jim Wallace jabbed him with a hot eye and flung a long arm at the maroon Number 5. "Cliff Arnold seems to get around—with an identical car."

Riker ran a hand through his yellow hair as he watched the maroon car hit a curve. "He does, at that," he conceded in deep perplexity. "Maybe I'm not quite so hot, any more."

"Well, get hot!" Wallace snapped. "I handed you and Cliff Arnold cards—identical cars—and if one of you cleans up the circuit I'm entering him in the big races here an' in Europe with twelve thousand dollars worth of car and all the backing. Isn't that enough to make you roll?"

"Don't seem to be," Tom Riker muttered. "Cliff's taken me in the last three starts. My motor's—"

Jim Wallace tugged at his gray mustache. "Lay off the motor!" he snapped. "I came over here to bawl you out from hell to breakfast, kid. Now I'm calling that off. Listen, I'm an old driver myself and if ever I saw a man that's through it's you. You ought to quit right now."

Tom Riker shook his head. "You may be right, but I've still got to prove it to myself. I've been hitting these corners right on the edge of the limit of speed. I—"

"Yeah?" Big Jim's voice was raucous. "Well, hit 'em harder or I'll jerk that alligator right out from under you an' give it to old Mike Bell. That's what they call an ultimatum, Riker."

Tom Riker yawned again. "Excuse me," he mumbled. "Sitting up all night with a sick motor is worse than sitting up with a sick friend."

Ben, with many assistants, eased Number 4 to the ground.

Jim Wallace looked hard at Riker. "You heard me the first and last time. Beat Cliff Arnold to-day."

Tom Riker shook his head. "I don't think I can do it," he said.

As Jim Wallace stalked away he saw Tom cock his ear to listen with plain forebodings to the sixteen valve double overhead camshaft job blaring out the revs.

"Turnin' yellow—and knows it!" the old man growled. "I could be sorry for the kid if he wasn't blamin' it on my invention and a good motor."

Back in his convertible Jim Wallace was joined by the young pilot of the maroon car. Cliff Arnold's broad good-looking face, spotted with oil and plastered with dust, was illumined as usual by a smile. Of all the racing men that Wallace had seen in his day Cliff Arnold approached most nearly the debonair, daring young speed pilot.

"I got around in twenty-nine and a fifth seconds, boss," he reported cheerfully. "Must I admit that's pretty good for this track or do you happen to know it already?"

"I know it." Old Jim returned his smile. "Fast enough to place you in the front row, inside, for the start, isn't it?"

"Unless Tom Riker and Mike Bell cut a fifth off it," Arnold amended.

"Don't go gray-haired over Riker." Jim Wallace was vicious about it.

Cliff Arnold shrugged. "I don't turn pale over anybody," he said. "Not with an Accello in my gas line."

Wallace turned his rugged face to the pilot.

"You do think Accello is an advantage?" he asked.

"Do I! It's improved my acceleration."

Wallace frowned. "It will cost me plenty to put it on the market with a big advertising campaign."

Cliff Arnold started to speak, was silent and then touched the older man diffidently on the shoulder. "Look here," he said. "Don't you believe any of this chatter about why Tom Riker's knocking your invention."

"What chatter?" Wallace demanded. "What chatter?"

"I don't believe it—not a word of it," Cliff Arnold insisted. "But the talk is—well, if Riker discouraged you about the Accello you might drop it or sell it out cheap to some other accessory outfit who'd make a pile."

Jim Wallace's face turned granite hard. "There's some answer to the way Tom Riker's acting," he said coldly. "He certainly isn't reporting on Accello like you are."

Cliff Arnold nodded reluctantly. "I'm telling you how good it is with first places," he said.

Jim Wallace grunted assent. "Bring Mike Bell over to see me, will you?"

"Give Riker a chance!" Cliff Arnold urged. "I told you I didn't believe—"

"He knows he's got to win today," Wallace said grimly.

Cliff Arnold nodded. "Fair enough," he said. "Well, you couldn't do better than Mike Bell if Tom doesn't come through. Mike's a tough nut to crack on any track. I'll tell him you want him."

Obediently he hurried away. But before he reached Mike Bell that hefty giant had hurled himself out onto his trial lap in his aluminum projectile. Jim, chewing a cigar, watched the old-timer bend his snarling, silvery mount around the sharp corners and blare home. Twenty-nine and three fifths seconds. Within two-fifths of Arnold—and without the aid of an Accello.

SOME twenty minutes later Tom Riker got Number 4 away on his time trial. To big Jim, watching intently, it seemed that Tom roared into the turns from the short straightaways at a faster pace than he had seen before that day. Certainly the car threw more dirt high into the air as the driver struggled to hold it on the curving track. But the

rasping loudspeaker brought Jim Wallace back to earth by announcing the time was thirty seconds flat.

"He don't handle his car any more," Jim Wallace decided. "I wouldn't swear he wasn't letting me down on purpose."

The time trials dragged on amidst a growing impatience in the grandstands. Frenzied young men who earlier that day had tinkered with their cars, magnificently seeking perfection, now sought only to boot them around fast enough to qualify.

"The pits are no place to do more'n change plugs," a hoarse bass at Jim Wallace's ear stated. "You want to hot up your mill a couple o' days before and then leave it lay."

It was massive Mike Bell, ushered by Cliff Arnold.

"I seen you back in the Vanderbilt Cup days," Mike said. He glanced back at the pits. "Want to sign me up for this Accello thing? I was a young riding mech when—"

"What're you looking at back there?" Jim Wallace interrupted.

"Tom Riker's mech—chunky guy named Ben Brown—has flown. Gone like gas out of a tank!"

Cliff nodded confirmation.

"Huh!" Wallace chewed his cigar. "Brown couldn't ha' been slowing up that mill of Tom's—"

Both pilots shook their heads.

"Not a chance," Arnold said. "Tom's tops as a mechanic. Nobody could put over any of that stuff on him. I guess the mech just got tired of losing races."

"Listen to Tom tell it," Mike said, jerking a hand. The tall driver was loping toward them. "D'you find him, Tom?"

Tom Riker shook his head. He came to a halt, awkwardly clutching the back of his neck in thought. He contemplated his two rivals.

"He seems to have gone," he said slowly. "Right when I needed him most, before the big scramble."

"I'll fix you up—some," Mike volunteered, "if you can stand a crepehanger as a mechanic. Hey, Gussie!"

A gangling and lugubrious youth, rather gray of face, approached cautiously. He was attired in grease-covered overalls and seemed to expect the worst.

"I don't need him," Mike said. "He can handle a wrench but, brother, his merry chatter gets me down."

Cliff Arnold looked at Mike suddenly. He said nothing.

"Do you think you can keep me rolling in the main event, Gussie?" Tom Riker asked.

"Not if you wheel it like you did in the time trials," Gussie said with dismal honesty. "You're heading for the fence."

"Don't pay no attention to him, Tom," Mike Bell said, grinning. "He always pulls that line about the fence."

"He might be right, at that," Tom Riker conceded. "I don't feel lucky today. Come on, Gussie."

The two walked away with drooping shoulders. Jim Wallace snorted.

The starter was beckoning out the cars in the pits. The last clunker in the time trials, missing hopelessly, had been waved off the track.

"I'll have to be getting busy," Cliff Arnold said. "Soft riding to you, Mike."

"I hope you break your neck," Mike replied cordially. "I better talk business later, Mr. Wallace. It's time to wheel my two pot—two carbureter—job against your gadget."

THE starter, dashing this way and that through roaring confusion, finally got the entrants—special jobs, flatheads, D. O.'s, one stick jobs, rocker arms and clunkers—lined up two by two and away for the flying start.

Jim Wallace watched them circling the track. Cliff Arnold's maroon special held the coveted pole position. Mike Bell's silvery mount ran beside him. Behind them, amidst a jarring discord of

colors, rode Tom Riker in his black D. O. Alone in Riker's pit the sad Gussie fiddled with a jack.

They held position, the fourteen muttering cars, as they came around toward the grandstand stretch. The starter, after a monosyllabic word with the men watching the formation up in the judges' stand, clutched his flag tighter. He bent his legs warily as, with increasing speed, the fourteen cars bore down on him. After one final glance at the line-up he snapped out his green flag. Off!

With a burst of thunder the cars lunged ahead. Formation broke into smoking, blaring chaos as drivers, swift as fencers, fought to jam their accelerating mounts through the dusty, shifting pattern of hurtling steel.

The first curve was dead ahead. In scant seconds those close-ranked speeding cars would hit it, sliding, bouncing, skidding, perhaps spinning.

Old pilot though he was Jim Wallace clenched his teeth. The quick and the dead! These men were quick. And they had courage. None gave place without a fight. Whirring tires, deadly to each other as circular saws, bouncing hubs, front springs and waspish tails threatened, lurched on, came closer to a clash, swept apart. But always the cars tore on around the corner.

Through the dust of all those churning wheels Jim caught a glimpse of the three. Cliff Arnold clung to the infield fence. Mike Bell, outside Arnold and riding close, fought to get his rear wheels ahead of his rival's. Tom Riker, two lengths behind, was taking the bank high with a jumble of cars inside sliding perilously up toward him.

Just one curve—and there were forty miles, eighty laps, a hundred and sixty curves, to come!

Once past the first corner, thundering on at the limit of speed on the rough dirt, the powerful cars that had blasted to the front drew away from the field. In the midst of the dusty ruck rode Tom Riker, champion of the previous year. Lengths behind Cliff Arnold and Mike Bell, he was behind three other cars as well.

Jim Wallace shook his head. "Not there!" he growled. "Why?"

Pressed by Mike Bell, young Arnold was driving at close to twenty-nine seconds a lap. His speed demanded terrific acceleration on every short straightaway. Then the next curve, looming up, called for brakes and a lifted throttle foot in the inexorable name of centrifugal force.

Arnold cut speed no more than he must. And Mike Bell hung on Arnold's blunt, stream-lined tail like a trailer. Tom Riker's black double overhead camshaft job and the cars close to it were turning the track at no more than a second slower. But at Arnold's pace that second difference meant a loss to Tom of ninety-one feet a lap. A gap between the two leaders and the rest of the field widened steadily. The slowest of the fourteen cars were dropping far behind, doomed to be lapped.

The time came swiftly when Cliff Arnold was staring at two tail-enders looming up ahead of him. He managed to pass both close to the end of the grandstand stretch. While Mike was pocketed behind the sliding clunkers, Cliff Arnold stretched his lead a hundred feet.

Jim Wallace's keen old eyes were more often on that black enigma, Tom Riker, than on the leaders. He still wanted the answer on Tom Riker. Though the two in front were driving into the curves hard, Tom was hitting them harder. He rarely touched his brake. His speeding machine fought to shoot up into the crash rail. His straining arms were tried to the limit as he struggled with muscle and brain to keep the skittering rear wheels churning on around the banked dirt. Jim Wallace frowned.

All this driving got Tom Riker nowhere. Twice, in the swirling dust on a corner, he overtook the green car in fifth place. Twice the driver of the green car

caught up again on the straightaway and passed him. The three cars just ahead of Tom remained closely bunched. They lost ground to the two leaders. But Tom's furious wheeling on the curves kept them uncorking all they had under the hood to keep him behind them.

The race roared on. Wallace studied Riker's wheelwork. Tom was feeling out the rough surface of those sections where the straightaway turned abruptly onto the banked curve. He tried clinging to the infield fence as he went into the corners and he tried a broader sweep from the outer side of the straightaway. By whittling away his factor of safety as he tested the curves he increased his speed.

"You'll be runnin' out o' track!" Wallace predicted savagely.

Tom overtook the green car again and this time held his place. Relentlessly he blared after the next one. He pressed them hard. Laps went reeling past in the billowing, choking dust and still he clung to fifth place.

The cylinder head gasket under the hood of the first of these two cars that Tom pursued suddenly blew under the terrific compression of the screaming motor. Instantly the other car, a flaming red flathead, swept past the crippled speedster. Tom Riker, too, rode past it. But through all this, these machines slowly dropped further behind Arnold and Bell.

Far back among the tail-enders a clunker spun twice on a corner. With dying momentum it ploughed through the infield fence and toppled over. The track was clear; the starter did not flash his yellow caution flag.

Up in the lead, with the eyes of most of the spectators on them, Cliff Arnold and Mike Bell were staging a close battle. Lap by lap Mike in his shimmering silver mount had chipped away the gap separating him from the maroon car. Once back on Arnold's heels Mike hung there for several laps, taking the other's dirt and flying grit, waiting. Arnold's pace was so hot that to pass was a tough job. During those brittle moments the two leading cars crawled up behind Tom Riker and the car he pressed.

Arnold, with Mike Bell riding so close, had no time to hesitate. He jammed down his foot and took Tom Riker and his rival on the backstretch.

Jim Wallace watched. Cliff Arnold passed Riker in his similar car with a single surge of power. And then, on the grandstretch, Mike Bell, too, went past Tom Riker. He put up no fight at all, save in the way he barrelled into the curves. Tom Riker was lapped as well as beaten.

"He's throwing it!" Wallace growled, but the perplexed frown stayed on his face. On the curves Riker was risking his neck—to throw a race!

The race was three quarters over, now. Only about twenty laps to go! Mike Bell decided it was time to act. There is no percentage in riding a man's tail and taking his dirt on a half miler. Mike Bell swung out, with all he had, when the grandstand straightaway opened up again.

Cliff Arnold answered the challenge. But Mike was out for blood. The big pilot's shining car churned up alongside Arnold's as they shot past the yelling grandstands. And Mike stayed there, fighting for inches. Though he was outside, and nearer the crash rail, Mike Bell did not ease up on the gas.

Wheel and wheel they surged into the turn. Cliff Arnold reached for his brake as Mike had grimly counted that he would. But Arnold did not get his car under control in time. He slid.

Mike, watching him like a hawk, lacked only a fraction of a second to pull ahead. But as Jim Wallace knew well, a fraction of a second is a long time in a race. Arnold's skittering right rear wheel smacked against Mike's left front.

Instantly, hot tires blew. The machines rocked and shuddered. A huge

cloud of dust went spurting up from the churning rubber. In that veiling brown bank both pilots fought screaming, riotous metal that suddenly had gone wild.

Jim Wallace groaned.

MIKE Bell got all the worst of it. His car went shooting up the bank. It sideswipped the crash rail hard. The heavy timber groaned and shook but hurled the machine down the slanting dirt again. The car spun vertiginously, with right wheels dished, steering washed out, motor stalled. Mike hung onto his wheel.

Cliff Arnold's mount had dropped onto its wheels again. Right front and right rear shoes had blown. But the clash had killed his spin. The iron rims slowed down the car.

Arnold, with a backward glance at the shrouded track, pulled over tight against the infield fence and limped on.

The red flathead and Tom Riker's black car were joining the party. The drivers had seen the mix-up in time to give them a chance. They threw out the anchors in a hurry but neither man braked hard enough to make a disaster out of the crack-up by losing control. In the swirling dust it was hard guessing. Both pilots made their play for safety up by the crash rail. It was the right answer. They squeezed past.

The red car's driver ran out of luck the minute he had saved his life. One of his shoes picked up a chunk of something sharp from Mike Bell's shattered car. A hundred feet further on, before he had gotten back much speed, the tire blew. The disgusted driver mastered the leap of his car. He looked swiftly across toward the grandstand. Then, with great satisfaction, he waved Tom Riker, inches behind him, to slow down. The yellow flag was out. No passing permitted with a wreck on the track.

Mike Bell had dragged himself out onto his feet. With mighty muscles he was shoving his broken mount on its crooked wheels down to the infield fence, where it would be a lesser danger to the other cars. The starter continued to show his yellow flag. Cliff Arnold's car hobbled unpassed around toward the pits. All over the track the pace dropped off.

Jim Wallace mopped his face. "They've been rolling 'em," he conceded.

Though almost a lap behind Cliff Arnold and trailing the red flathead, Tom Riker rode on four hard shoes. In third place, one lap behind, he would be leading before Cliff Arnold had changed two wheels and the red car one. But there were nearly twenty laps ahead—and old Jim Wallace, for one, knew how much faster Arnold had been turning the half mile circuit.

"It's Cliff Arnold's race, now that Mike Bell is out of it," Jim Wallace told himself. "Even if Tom takes the lead while Arnold's in the pits Tom can't stand him off with twenty laps to go."

His eyes suddenly grew wider in quick surprise.

Tom Riker, too, had turned into his pits. His last chance to win was gone! He was shouting to his borrowed mechanic. That gloomy young man leaped toward the car and unstrapped the black hood as Tom slid out of the bucket seat.

Jim Wallace's grim face grew black with quick suspicion as Tom left the track.

"Quitting altogether?" he rasped.

On his high perch he craned his neck. It looked like the intake manifold that Tom and Gus were working on. That was where the Wallace Accello was located.

Wallace dropped lithely over the side of the roadster and raced toward Riker's pits. This was his job.

It was the intake manifold near the carbureter that engrossed the mechanic and a new Tom Riker, begrimed, red-eyed, fierce.

"Why d'you stop?" Wallace demanded.

There was room for only one at that job. And the mournful mechanic was fast.

Tom, with a couple of wrenches ready, jerked himself aside. With his eyes on the manifold he snapped at the old man over his shoulder. "I've been strangling my mill and cursing it out like the yellow featherfoot I thought I was! Well, the mill's right! I'm right!"

"So what?" demanded Jim Wallace, eyes on the gas line.

"So I'm ripping out this rotten gadget that's clogging my gas flow! Accello be damned! Out!"

"You leave that alone!" Jim Wallace roared.

Tom Riker darted a savage glance at him. His tortured, black-rimmed eyes condemned Walace and his gadget in a flash of fire.

"I'm a pilot—a racing man—a damned good one—and I'm going to ride if it costs me the car!" he cried. "You want a test—I'll give you one!"

Jim Wallace growled in his throat.

"This wrench, Gus," Tom cried. "Step on it! Accello, hell! I know that motor. It's got guts—and I've been kicking it in the face! Go on! Gus, you've got it!"

Violently, while Wallace stood stricken still, he plucked the tiny Accello out of the manifold and flung it down into the dirt.

"No sleep at night!" Tom Riker raged. "Wondering if I'm yellow! No gun under my foot! No breather for my motor! Take 'em on the bends—and watch 'em pass me on the next stretch! Damn your gadget!"

He darted an agonized glance down the line to where men were jerking the wheels off Arnold's maroon car.

Jim Wallace picked his Accello up out of the dirt. His face was black. "You know who entered your car," he said curtly. "Well, I'm withdrawing this entry right now. Get off the track."

He took a step toward the judges' stand and the watching starter. Tom Riker jumped in front of him and stopped him with outstretched hands.

"Wait" he cried. "I'm talking to an old driver even if he is a lousy inventor. You've seen me ride today—thirty tough miles! I owe it to this hot job to roll it! Are you telling me you won't let me finish?"

"How about the Accello?" Wallace's voice was iron hard.

The red flathead got away in a cloud of blue smoke. Its exultant driver aired out for all he had.

"Your gadget's killing my power." Tom Riker's voice was just as hard as the old pilot's. His eyes blazed at Jim Wallace. "I say your Accello's been throttling a good mill. It's out! What's the verdict?"

Motors were snarling; the stench of oil was in Jim Wallace's nostrils. And Tom Riker's eyes were steady on his face.

"You're wrong, kid, but you can make a mutt out o' me by winning," Jim Wallace said. "Take her away!"

Old Jim's eyes turned to Cliff Arnold, back in his Accello-equipped speedster. The jacks dropped the car onto the track; it blasted away from the pits.

"You're still a full lap behind Accello, Riker," Jim Wallace said through his teeth.

Tom's face twisted in a contorted, fighting grin. He smacked the lugubrious Gus on the back and silently leaped into his bucket seat. Gus flung himself at the straps of the hood, fastened them and jumped back. With a roar black Number 4 shot off.

"I should have had him put off," Jim Wallace told himself. "A lap behind—and only a few to go!"

Soberly he hurried back to his car.

The pilot of the red job was passed a couple of laps later by Cliff Arnold's smoothly snarling maroon machine. But he still rode in second place. He turned his head as he came out onto the backstretch and saw Tom Riker's mount sliding off the bend behind him. Confidently he climbed onto his throttle to open a gap on the stretch.

Four seconds later something black and fast went past outside the red car's startled driver.

His hand leaped to his brake handle to keep clear of the crash he expected. But the black car slamming into the curve didn't go skittering up into the crash rail. Tom Riker bent it around. Somehow his rear wheels kept churning dirt. A full lap behind Cliff Arnold! Passing the red one meant nothing to Tom—nothing!

"He can't hit the corners much harder than he's hitting them right along," Jim Wallace conceded grudgingly. "There's something wrong with his mill—only it's not Accello. It's the motor."

But Wallace, watching in enchained tensity, saw a difference in Riker's style. The desperate drive, with wheels fighting steering wheel as the shooting car was forced into the curve, was the same. But Number 4's momentum was no longer cut down during the rest of the long turn by the soft, rutted, curving dirt.

Cliff Arnold, wiping the dust off his goggles, suddenly found the black car that he had lapped alongside him near the end of the backstretch. Alongside—and going by him! After a darting glance at the bend ahead Arnold played it as had the red car's pilot—with his brakes.

JIM WALLACE nodded approval. There is no percentage in racing a crazy pilot through the crash rail; especially when you're a lap ahead.

But Tom Riker didn't seem to be quite crazy. He got away with it, coaxing his skittering rear end back into place and jabbing down on the throttle again the instant he had won control.

He was on the same lap as Cliff Arnold now. A man loomed beside Wallace's roadster. The old pilot dropped a glance at him.

It was Mike Bell, with the blood from a splinter's gash already dry on his leathery face. He had his arm over the shoulders of a much smaller man in overalls, who seemed a mere walking stick beside him.

"Tom's missing mech, Ben Brown himself," Mike introduced him. "I picked him up way over in the infield near my crack-up. And why d'you suppose he dropped out of the picture? Spill it, you!"

Ben Brown clamped his jaw shut.

Mike Bell growled. "I like fast ridin' an' fair," he said. "I choked it out of this little hoptoad once and I c'n do it—"

"Stop!" gurgled the chunky mechanic, as his face turned blue under Mike's iron fingers. "C-Cliff Arnold p-paid off. He—he's leary o' Riker. In this b—business you want to grab any dough you see. There ain't much going around."

"Cliff Arnold paid you—to disappear!" Jim Wallace exploded. He darted a look at two cars, black and maroon, that were having a race. "Paid you so that—"

"So that Riker'd be gummed up with no help and wouldn't cop," said the mechanic, still writhing under Mike's fingers.

"And what a waste of good jack that was!" Mike Bell mourned. "Tom can handle a wrench an' he don't need no help or cheerin' when his mill's right. Out on the track you're alone. You win or lose on your car's guts and your own heart, mostly heart."

"I ought to know it," Jim Wallace said slowly. "Heart! I knew it once. An' I like answers, even when—"

His eyes picked up the race. The roaring black car was gulping down the long band of brown dirt that separated it from Arnold's maroon speedster. But the laps were going fast. The checkered flag could not be far away. Riker was nearly half a lap behind. Heart!

Cliff Arnold jerked his head away from the roaring road ahead to look back across the infield at the spurting dust flung skyward by his rival's scouring wheels. Riker was airing out. Arnold hunched himself up over his wheel and

barreled into the turn out of the grandstand stretch.

"Mistake!" muttered Mike Bell. "Arnold ain't been hitting 'em that hard."

A mistake it was. The car slid, using its momentum to scrape up a geyser of harsh brown dirt with wheels that ploughed sideways. Arnold conquered his slide before he hit the crash rail. Instantly he got the job rolling again and accelerated in a hurry.

"Nice pick-up," Mike Bell commented casually. His big fingers were still clamped around Ben Brown's neck.

"That's the Wallace Accell—" Old Jim stopped dead. He looked again at Arnold's maroon job, as if he were seeing it for the first time.

"Mike!" Wallace said harshly. "D'you suppose Cliff Arnold has an Accello fitted to that mill? Has he been fooling me about it?"

Mike coughed and shuffled his huge feet. "Boy, oh, boy—there's the starter gettin' out his blue flag!" he muttered. "Arnold's only got a lap an' a half to go!"

"There's no Accello in Arnold's job, Mr. Wallace," the captive of Mike's mighty fingers said ingratiatingly. "Lay off me, Mike! Arnold's mech told me he slipped it out o' the manifold right after you looked over the mill this mornin', sir. How about takin' them claws out o' my neck, Mike?"

Jim Wallace sank back; then sat up again very stiffly.

"I l-like fair play myself," he gritted. "Come on, Tom—come on!"

Riker was coming. He kept those rear wheels churning, kicking his mount around the rutted ring. Now he was close, riding blindly full in Arnold's dust cloud.

"It's a break for you to find out in time how dud them Accellos are," Mike muttered. "Look at Tom step!"

As the two bellowing cars shot down the grandstand stretch into the last lap, Arnold looked back once more.

Though nearly level with him, Tom Riker was driving wide down the straightaway, as if figuring on riding the bank high. He kept peaking his speed to pass Arnold's machine in the first moment of the turn.

"Watch it, kid!" Jim Wallace muttered anxiously. "Tough corner!"

Cliff Arnold made it hard. He held pace as long as he dared. Then, as the curve came up, he swerved away from the infield fence to block the black car.

But the bends that race had all been tough for Tom Riker. He was keyed to take what came. Head pivoting vigilantly, Tom swerved, too—the other way. Swaying, bouncing, on the verge of trouble, he knifed in behind the maroon car, into the narrow space that Arnold had left beside the infield fence. There was room. But for an instant it seemed as if no muscles and skill could keep the rocking black car from sliding up into Arnold's machine.

Time stopped.

The instant passed. That black bus was part of Tom Riker. The cars did not clash. Still Tom cajoled and manhandled his mount into submission. The two cars bounced on around the curve. Tom Riker, in the inside berth now, uncorked all that that turn would allow.

"That's ridin'!" Mike Bell muttered.

On the backstretch Tom Riker made his lead twenty-five feet. On the homestretch, after bending around the last curve, he lengthened it to sixty feet as the checkered flag of victory was snapped before his black car.

"Whoo!" gasped Mike Bell.

"It's tougher watching than riding," Jim Wallace agreed, blotting sweat on his forehead. "And I'm going to do plenty of watching—with a kid like that wheeling twelve thousand dollars worth of gun against the best in the world."

"What?" Mike Bell was startled.

"Well, he saved me more than that, didn't he?" Jim Wallace argued sheepishly. "But it's a damn good thing for him I wheeled 'em before I started inventing for them."

THE CAMP-FIRE

OUR Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with the June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard and welcomed.

WE are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

BUT something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

PERHAPS our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different stations toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

IF YOU are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

WHAT about war?

Officially there's practically none of it going on, at this writing, though there are a great many fighting men and fairly harmless civilians departing the earth, and the cause doesn't seem to be careless drivers either.

Out in the Orient it isn't war, but a correction of anti-Japanese propaganda and a spreading of Japanese culture and they're only using high explosive to put it over with a bang.

In Spain there seem to be two parties of opposite political beliefs working out an election in a country not yet equipped with polls and voting machines or Tammany leadership, and both sides seem to have brought in ringers from other nations to make sure the balloting is fair and their own side wins.

In Ethiopia the natives seem to be trying to demonstrate a theory that it's one thing to fly over a country and scare people into running under trees, and it's something else to go out with a plow and farm the place.

In the Mediterranean a submarine nobody owns pops up and looses some torpedoes and pops down again, and the powers try to get Italy to declare with them against tactics like this on the part of Father Neptune.

And the big dictators pout and strut, make their bluffs and set off false alarms, which seems to be the way a personal government is run.

And they let their boys go at it here and there in an informal way just to show they've got the boys and don't care how soon things begin, once they've figured out their own personal exits in case they lose.

But it isn't war. It's deadly enough but a kind of penny ante, in which the players can pass, or drop out of the pot, or get a dollar and a half ahead and say they've got to catch the midnight train. It isn't war until all the big fellows come in and take off their collars and call the game war.

This is all leading up to another book by *Adventure* and *Ask Adventure* men, Major R. Ernest Dupuy and Major George Fielding Eliot—"If War Comes," published by Macmillan.

The book avoids prophecy so far as it can—its purpose is to give the up-to-date military picture of the world—what nations, what strengths, what causes and provocations, what line-ups, what arms and tactics—a notable book it is, which has already attracted wide attention, notable for the clear picture of the new big war and the new methods and strategies—if the war comes. The picture is clear for the professional soldier and the man in the street. The list of chapters gives the idea. (Chapter III uses material from the author's two-part article, "Soul of the Soldier," which appeared in our pages):

Introductory

I The Spanish Fury: Rehearsal for War?

Part I

The Game

II The Basic Rules—They Never Change
III The Soul of the Warrior
IV Of New and Fearsome Weapons
V What About the Air?
  I The Coming of Air Power
  II The Instruments of Air Power
  III The Mission of Air Power
VI What Will War on Land Be Like?
  I Prelude to Battle
  II At Grips
  III Forts Have Their Uses—But—
VII What Will War at Sea Be Like?
  I The Nature and Effects of Sea Power
  II The Instruments of Sea Power
  III The Strategy of Sea Power
VIII What's All This About Gas?

IX War of Words—Lies and Spies
X What Will War Mean to the Civilian?

Part II
The Moves

XI Paths of Conquest
XII Germany
XIII Italy
XIV Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
XV Japan
XVI France and Britain
XVII The High Cost of Being in the Way
XVIII America—on the Sidelines?

It's a very real book.

WE WELCOME a new man into our Writers' Brigade. He is a brawny fellow with a good deal of personal vigor that shows up in his writing. He is C. F. Kearns, and he had especial reasons for wanting to see a story of his in our magazine. He submits this account of himself for the Camp-Fire's *Who's Who*:

My birthplace—Coulee City, in the arid sagebrush lands of Washington—will soon be swallowed up by the reservoir of the Coulee Dam. My Irish parents brought me to B. C. as a toddler and my childhood was spent in the border cattle country where I acquired a reasonable dexterity both in the navigation of cayuses and the extraction of milk from more or less domesticated cows of mixed lineage.

Schooling was sketchy. I was passable in literature, history and geography but a flop in the other subjects. Athletic sports of the rugged variety were much more interesting.

My first job was pushing a pen in a financial bank and my second one was in a clay bank with a pick and shovel. I was sixteen then, and the latter position paid a man's wages. Later I became acquainted with the management of an eight foot saw in the big timbers of the Pacific coast, also choker hooks, and loading tongs, and the rest of the weighty impedimenta of an exceedingly vigorous industry. Also I did time in stores and offices, and tried to sell such ephemeral things as mining stocks.

If I wasn't so hot at some of the jobs that required a bit of thought now and then, I was consoled that I could hold up my end with any of the sturdy and polyglot nationalities who do the heavy lifting.

Six months on active service with the R.A.F. were the highlights of forty months army life. I was a ham-handed, two-hundred-and-odd-pounds pilot and the assorted planes that I piled up over the European landscape (our own planes, I mean) were undoubtedly part of the reason that the war was so expensive.

My interest in the outdoors and the wild game that roams therein has always been personal but for the past sixteen years it has been professional. Incidentally—alarmist reports to the contrary notwithstanding—B. C. is one section of North America that has more game and fur bearing animals within its borders than the Indians, let alone the original white settlers, ever knew.

Thirty years of sensible game management—candidly enforced—is the reason.

Hence I know the Pilot of Lost Creek and all his confreres intimately. I have tried to write about them as I know them, and it looked easy but it took me four years to complete the tale.

For the rest, life has never been dull since I met a very delectable lady away back when we were young, and a couple of assorted modern kids who sometimes laugh at me, but mostly with me, seem to keep us up with the times.

After twenty-five years of reading *Adventure* it is indeed a privilege to salute the circle.

HERE'S another *Lost Trails* notice that found its mark, according to Frank Merteul of Knoxville, Tennessee.

I have found my old buddy. *Adventure* is on the newsstands on the 10th of each month. After my notice appeared for the first time, The Billboard forwarded me a letter from Jim Novak, dated June 10th—the same day that the magazine was on sale. That's promptness! Many thanks.

THE red shark that C. Blackburn Miller, of the Salt Water Anglers of America, wrote about still seems to be of an unidentified species, but here's an account of another one further down the coast. We hear from Commander J. M. Sheppard of the Pan American Society of Tropical Research.

C. Blackburn Miller's "Shark On Largo Flats" can well be a fact story. Doubting Thomases should have been with us on our

1932 expedition-cruise when, after a full four hour battle, we succeeded in killing a red shark off the coast of Quintana Roo that measured sixteen feet and eight inches in length. This particular denizen of tropical waters had gobbled up the yacht's pet cat which had inadvertently fallen by the board and his persistency in wanting more kitty led him into range of our harpoon. Incidentally, five well placed shots from a Savage 250-3000 were needed to put the quietus on this fellow. The coloring of our shark approximated a maroon shade but could pass for a red of sorts. At the moment we had neither the time nor the inclination to mount and preserve the specimen and as I recall, our ichthyologist was of the opinion that the shark's coloring was due to some strange disease.

COMRADE A. D. Stivers of Dallas, Texas, gives us what he claims is the origin of the toast "How!"

I have read *Adventure* for more years than I care to admit, missing only some numbers in 17-18-19 when I was unavoidably absent in France and Germany.

H. Bedford-Jones' "West Point Gray" particularly interested me as did the request for further information on American military traditions. I am not a graduate of West Point as some defective teeth kept me from passing the entrance examination in 1900 or 1901—I forget which.

My great-grandfather, Gen. Gabriel Rene Paul; my grandfather, Capt. Chas. B. Stivers; and my father, Lt. Col. Chas. P. Stivers were graduates. My younger brother, Maj. Chas. P. Stivers, is now in the regular army. My youngest brother, 1st Lt. Gerald B. Stivers, was killed in action in France. I served in the U. S. Army from April 6th, 1917, till July 20, 1919. Perhaps I am bragging a bit.

I was raised in small army posts mostly in the Southwest. I was in the Philippines for a little more than a year in 1902-3, helping Mike Healy haul army supplies to isolated garrisons in the old *Indianapolis*, an ex-Chinese river steamer with too much upperworks so she traveled on her side when the wind blew. Healy could have done it in a canoe. He later commanded the *Sheridan* and I believe the *Thomas*. Over there I knew Hunter Liggett well and John J. Pershing slightly. Both were grand guys then and later, and do not let anyone tell you differently.

I write all the above, which is not of much interest to anyone but me, to show that I know something of the tradition of the "old Army."

Not a tradition but as famous as any is the old Army toast of "How." The general public is almost 100 per cent mistaken as to the origin of this toast. It is usually attributed to the greeting used by Indians who knew a little English. Its real origin is as follows: The chemical symbol for water is H_2O. Add whiskey and omit the 2 and you have "HOW." I have heard it in many parts of the world and in quite unusual circumstances.

"WATCH your p's and q's—Robert Staite of San Diego, California, takes exception to the pint-and-quart explanation given by Artist Windas, and ascribes its origin to the printing shop.

In the feature, "Traditions of the Deep-watermen" by Cedric W. Windas, I was more than surprised at his definition of the expression "Watch your p's and q's." This I believe to be an error and I am quite certain that if he will extend his research a little further, he will agree with me. "Watch your p's and q's" originated in the printing office in this way: before the advent of the type-setting machine all type was set by hand and the apprentice in the printing office who would later become a compositor had first of all to learn the "case" which held the type —this case was composed of two parts the "u. p." or upper case, holding the capital letters and the "l. c." or lower case, holding the small letters. Each case is fitted with numerous compartments—one for a's, one for b's and so on, through the whole alphabet. Now in learning the different compartments the novice would pick out a certain letter and to make sure he had the right one would look at the face of the type. Now if you look at the face of a lower case "q" it appears as a perfect "p" and if you look at the face of a "q" it will look like a "p." For that reason the beginner in the printing game very often misplaced his "p's and q's." Hence the caution voiced by the teacher—Watch your "p's and q's" or in other words avoid that most common of all mistakes in learning to be a compositor. The expression became common in all walks of life, meaning, of course, "be careful." I have been a Deep Waterman (having learned my apprenticeship on a Cape Horn trader out of Liverpool many years ago) and in later years a compositor on my own and other papers. . . .

Information you can't get elsewhere

Ask Adventure

THE tree of health is good for indigestion.

Request:—I have been investigating the products of the papaya, sometimes called "the tree of health," particularly that product known as the "Meat Tenderizer." I want to be satisfied that the products of this tree are all that they are represented to be before I become financially interested in them.

I know something about the tree, its melon like fruit growing in bunches, its tropical habitat and the reputation the fruit has for health giving qualities. What I wish particularly to know is whether the wonderful things written about the tree and its product are true.

—H. G. Morrison, Iron Mountain, Mich.

Reply by Mr. William R. Barbour:—About the papaya and its tenderizing qualities. There is no doubt it has them. The substance is a vegetable pepsin, called papayin, much resembling animal pepsin. Natives in the West Indies often wrap a cut of tough beef in a papaya leaf over night.

Actually, though, most of the substance is found in the rind of the un-mature fruits, and is obtained by scoring the rind and collecting the gummy white substance that exudes. I have been told that papayin is a constituent of a well known indigestion remedy.

Papayas do well in southern Florida and all through the West Indies. They begin to bear in twelve to eighteen months from seed, and continue for several years, though the fruits get smaller as the plant gets older. The tree only lives a few years. Rats and wind storms are the most serious enemies. The yield of fruits per acre is large, since the trees bear practically continuously and can be planted 10-15 feet apart.

Many people, myself included, are very fond of the fruit, especially with a little lime juice squeezed over it. The fruit is thin skinned and rots easily, so is not a good shipper and hence is seldom seen in northern markets.

SAILING the Seven Seas is no simple jaunt.

Request:—I should like to know how the old time sailors navigated by the stars, sun, and moon.

Will you please tell me where I can get information on the names of the stars or groups of stars and their locations at different hours and seasons?

You are, probably, a very busy man, so just tell me where I can get any of the desired information if you can.

—George Erickson, Northome, Mass.

Reply by Mr. Charles H. Hall:—The problem of navigation may be stated as the problem of finding the zenith. We can get from the Nautical Almanac the positions of the sun, moon or stars at any moment. We can measure only from the visible horizon to the celestial object, or measure the distance (angular) from the moon to a star.

The simplest sight for latitude is the "meridian altitude," taken when the sun is on the meridian. The altitude of the sun is measured from the horizon to the sun's "lower limb," (its edge nearest the horizon) with the sextant. This altitude, corrected for errors of the instrument, height of eye, parallax and refraction, is subtracted from 90 degrees which gives its "Zenith distance." Then the sun's declination is taken from the tables for the day and hour and added or subtracted according to whether one is north

or south of the equator. This gives the zenith distance of the equator which is equal to the latitude. Or the altitude of the north star, Polaris, may be measured. This star is not exactly at the pole so that a correction has to be made.

Longitude is found by comparing the time at ship, found by a morning or afternoon sight, with Greenwich time as shown by the chronometer, corrected, of course.

The early navigators, Columbus and from him on until the XVIIIth century, never knew their latitude within a degree or so and never really knew their longitude at all except by dead reckoning. The invention of the chronometer did much for the navigator. He could get the time by a "lunar" (measuring from moon to a star) but it was a long-winded calculation and with many chances of error.

You can get a star map, about letter size, from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., for a nickel. The Nautical Almanac is published by the U. S. Naval Observatory, Washington, D. C., but is pretty technical for one not a navigator. The U. S. Hydrographic Office also publishes star maps. "Astronomy from a Dipper," published by Houghton Mifflin & Co., Cambridge, Mass., is a good introduction to the constellations.

EVEN caterpillars have an interdependent economic system.

Request:—Is there any truth in the theory that tent caterpillars operate in a seven year cycle? That is every year there are more and more of them until they reach their seventh year and then they seem to dwindle in numbers for seven years. If this is true, please tell me why. Please send me the scientific name and classification of this pest. What is the best spray to be used on fruit trees for the killing of this insect?

—Lawrence Hayward, Stratford, Conn.

Reply by Dr. S. W. Frost:—There is a definite cycle in the outbreaks of the tent tree caterpillars. Just how many years it takes to build up a population of caterpillars sufficient to give a serious infestation, I cannot say. At any rate, it does not come in regular seven year periods. These cycles are due to various factors, chiefly parasites. There are certain wasp-like parasites which attack the eggs, pupa and caterpillars and reduce their numbers. When tent caterpillars are abundant, these parasites have a chance to increase in number. In the course of two or three years, the parasites become so abundant that they reduce the infestation of the tent caterpillars. When the number of tent caterpillars are diminished, the parasites have difficulty in finding caterpillars on which to live, and in turn perish. Thus, the tent caterpillar and the parasite take turns in their complex relation to one another. An infestation of tent caterpillars usually lasts for two or three years. Following this are periods of three or four years when they are not noticeable or destructive. We have been passing through a period of infestation. During the past two years unsprayed cherry and apple trees along the roadsides have almost been defoliated by these pests.

Lead arsenate, at the rate of three pounds to one hundred gallons of water is very effective in killing the caterpillars. This should be applied immediately. Spray the foliage completely with this material and the caterpillars will be killed when they eat the poisoned leaves. Commercial orchards are never troubled with tent caterpillars because the foliage is sprayed regularly every spring.

The apple tree tent caterpillar is known as, *Malacesema americana.* It belongs to the order *Lepideptera* in which all butterflies and moths are placed. There is a closely related tent caterpillar, *Malacesema diisstria,* which attacks forest trees and is known as the forest tree tent caterpillar.

THE best wood for bows.

Request:—I would be under obligations if you would advise me the relative value of Yew, Lemon, Bois d' arc, and Hickory for bows.

As a boy many years ago I made and used bows of Hickory, but they were much shorter and wider than those now in use by archers.

—F. A. LeMay, Houston, Tex.

Reply by Mr. Earl B. Powell:—While most archers put Yew in the front line, I personally along with a lot of other archers, put the Osage Orange first.

While there is no nicer wood to shoot, and the wood does good work, yet the Yew is badly affected by changes in temperature and is also easily damaged, and you never know when the darned thing will blow up on you.

The Osage Orange, also known as Bois d' arc, is not so smooth in action, but will shoot as far and hard, and you can take a bow out hunting and bring it back—still a bow. It is not much affected by changes in temperature.

You might say that for hunting (and I am a hunter by preference) the Osage Orange is

easily the best, while if you want it strictly for target work, the Yew is nicer. After all it is a matter of taste to a great extent.

If you can get first grade Osage Orange, it will do better work than any yew. And in the Red River region of Texas, there grows the finest Osage Orange in the world.

The Lemonwood (Degama) is the easiest to work, and about ninety-five per cent of the bows sold are of this wood. It varies a bit, but some pieces of the wood will shoot close to the Osage and Yew.

Hickory shoots well for a few hundred shots as a rule, but will then begin to lose its pep, and then gradually play out, and even mulberry, or red cedar, is far better.

CLEAN up the old coins.

Request:—I should like to know the best method of cleaning an old coin to bring out all of the lettering. I'd like to know, too, where to get a complete list of the valuable coins made in the United States.

—J. R. Creekmore, Greenwood, S. C.

Reply by Mr. Howland Wood:—As regards cleaning coins, would say simply this: if silver, you might clean them in household ammonia; if copper, it is a rather difficult matter. If they are green with verdigris you might clean them in a solution of seventy-five per cent Rochelle Salts to twenty-five per cent Sodium Hydroxide or Caustic Soda, adding sufficient water to make from two to five per cent solution of the two alkalines.

If greasy or dirty you might clean them in warm water, adding a little ammonia.

There are many other methods but these are the least liable to injure your coins. If the coins are very badly worn, nothing will bring out the lettering.

If you are looking for a premium book of United States coins, you can get a good one by sending twenty-five cents to the Scott Stamp & Coin Co., 1 West 47th St., New York, N. Y.

BABY crows thrive on an invalid's diet.

Request:—Will you please tell me at what point near Boston magpies can be found?

What is the average span of life of crows? Will they breed in captivity? If so, at what age is the first family to be expected?

—Frank Briand, Revere, Mass.

Reply by Mr. Davis Quinn:—Magpies belong to the west. The common eastern limit of their range is probably western Nebraska.

Barring accidental death, the crow should live fifty years or more. The raven (closely related to the crow, but slightly larger), has been kept alive in captivity for sixty-nine years).

Although I do not seem to find any record of crows breeding in captivity, I should imagine that if you had a tame pair of these birds they would very likely mate. The crow is quite easy to tame and makes an intelligent, amusing and interesting pet. Take it from nest just before it learns to fly. Feed boiled mashed potatoes thoroughly mixed with egg yolks hardboiled, which must be made fresh daily. Feed hourly six A.M. to dark. Each feeding, dip stick in water and put drops in bird's mouth. Keep in nest of sticks, not feathers.

Later feed fruit and green stuff, and when full grown, crows eat anything edible.

Crows mature for breeding at age of one year.

THE Civil Service has stiff requirements for boiler inspectors.

Request:—I understand that the United States Bureau of Navigation employs men for investigational work. I'd greatly appreciate information on this subject, especially on the following points.

What are the qualifications?

Through what channels is application made?

What is the pay and what are the possibilities of advancement?

I am thirty-one years old, high school graduate, several years college work at night (took no degree), have been a salesman, done merchandising and market research work, sailed five years as A.B. and quartermaster, and four years as third mate and second mate.

—John R. Bodler, New York, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Francis H. Bent:—I am wondering just what you refer to by "the Bureau of Navigation." There happens to be two such bureaus, one in the Department of Commerce and the other under the Navy Department.

I have no information concerning investigational work in the Bureau of Navigation, United States Department of Commerce, beyond that of the Inspector of Boilers, Inspector of Hulls, etc. Such positions require considerable technical knowledge and much

practical experience.

To be an Inspector of Hulls one must be between twenty-five and fifty-three years of age; in excellent physical condition; and take technical and practical examinations. For Seaboard ports he must have had at least three years of actual practical experience as Master of five hundred-ton, or chief mate of one thousand-ton, ocean vessels; for Great Lakes ports and River ports certain pilot requirements are additional.

The position is filled from an eligible list made up from those who pass examinations under the United States Civil Service Commission. Advance notice of all examinations is posted in all first- and second-class post offices.

Pay is $3200 a year for local Inspector and $2900 a year for Assistant Inspector.

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RATTLERS aren't the only snakes that vibrate their tails.

Request:—Will you please give me some information about the habits of rattlesnakes?

Do they mate permanently, or even for a season? That is, does one pair stay together; and is there anything to the supposition that if you killed one of the pair the other is likely to come to the same spot seeking the mate?

Can a rattlesnake recognize a particular individual person? How do they recognize? By sight? Smell? Sound? Assuming that the snake had reason to know one person (through fear, for example) how far off could he be recognized under the most favorable conditions?

How does a rattlesnake react to sudden danger? What does a snake do that corresponds to the sudden stiffening and raising the hair that a dog goes through, or a cat's arching its back and fluffing its tail?

I will appreciate your giving me any information you can on the above points. I have a rattlesnake story in mind, and I don't want some old timer calling me on such points. I suppose I should know a few of these things first hand; but the fact is that in spite of twenty-five years prowling around the deserts I have yet to see my first rattler except in captivity.

—E. R. McCartney, Glendale, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—Your letter comes as a great relief: I am weary of telling misled people that one cannot make a living catching rattlers. That is about the only question that I answer these days.

No one has ever shown that rattlers mate permanently or that they stay together in pairs for even as much as a season. Vast ignorance on this whole question as far as snakes are concerned exists. Cobras seem to mate at least for the season but just how much longer the same couple stays together is not known. Herpetologists, or rather ecologists, are just beginning to learn a little about the habits of snakes and no doubt many surprises are in store for the inquisitive. One of a temporarily or permanently mated pair would, of course, be expected to show up at the place where its mate met death.

Sight and smell are well developed in snakes but taste as we know it not at all. A rattler would probably depend on smell to recognize a human being unless that person had a very characteristic appearance that would help the snake recognize him. Mrs. Wiley is convinced that her rattlers learned to recognize her at least at close quarters. Presumably sound plays no part with them (or very little at best) unless it is transmitted through the sub-stratum. There is, however, no reason why a rattler should not learn to recognize a walk if the one walking always approached along a wooden floor on which the snake's box rested. When it comes to actual figures your guess is as good as mine. A snake smells by means of its tongue as well as with its nose. The tongue picks up tiny particles from the air or from an object and puts them into two small cavities in the roof of the mouth where a special organ (Jacobson's organ) "smells" them. The tongue itself plays only a secondary role.

The rattler responds to sudden danger by rattling or coiling or both. Vibrating the end of the tail is a common habit among snakes of many groups but only rattlesnakes have the rattles that enable the movement to produce a noise. Manning, while experimenting with rattlers, found that some individuals could be made to rattle by the appearance of one of his fingers from behind the blind that concealed him and his equipment. The blind was of course several feet from the snakes. A sensitive snake will rattle as much as twenty or more minutes without a halt even when the stimulus is not great. On the other hand, some individuals are quite apathetic.

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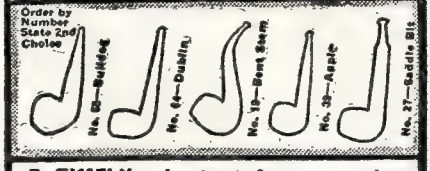

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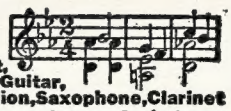
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29x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.45
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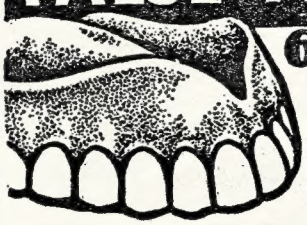

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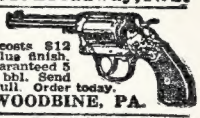

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Hall's Catarrh Medicine relieves phlegm-filled throat, stuffed up nose, catarrhal bad breath, hawking, and Sinus headaches caused by nasal congestion. **Relief or Your Money Back.** At all Druggist's. **Send Post Card for Free Treatment Chart. 65 years in business.**

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Double the life of your coat and vest with correctly matched pants, 100,000 patterns. Every pair hand tailored to your measure. Our match sent **FREE** for your O. K. before pants are made. Fit guaranteed. **Send piece of cloth or vest today.**

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Salaries of Men and Women in the fascinating profession of Swedish Massage run as high as $40 to $70 per week but many prefer to open their own offices. Large incomes from Doctors, hospitals, sanitariums and private patients come to those who qualify through our training. Reducing alone offers rich rewards for specialists. Write for Anatomy Charts, sample lesson sheets and booklet—They're FREE.

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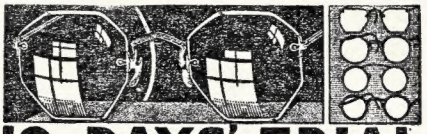

10 DAYS' TRIAL

SEND ONLY 20 CENTS with name, age and address, and by return mail **RECEIVE** a set of **14 TRIAL GLASSES** to select from to fit your eyes **NOTHING MORE TO PAY** until you can see perfectly far and near. Then the above **Beautiful Style** will cost you only $3.90, no more; other styles $2.20 and up.

We only handle **High Grade** Single Vision and **DOUBLE VISION** or **KRYPTOK BIFOCAL** toric lenses, ground into **ONE SOLID PIECE of GLASS. DOCTOR H. E. BAKER,** O.D., with over 30 years' experience, **GUARANTEES** to give you **Perfect Fit** or **NO COST.** Circular with latest styles and lowest prices **FREE.**

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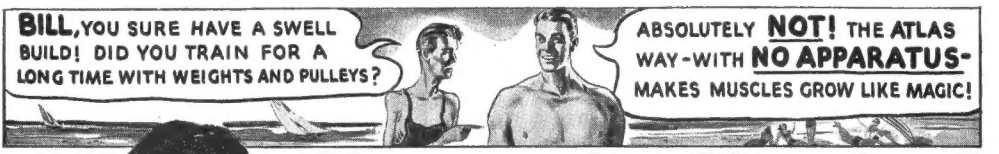
BILL, YOU SURE HAVE A SWELL BUILD! DID YOU TRAIN FOR A LONG TIME WITH WEIGHTS AND PULLEYS?
ABSOLUTELY NOT! THE ATLAS WAY-WITH NO APPARATUS-MAKES MUSCLES GROW LIKE MAGIC!

Here's the Kind of NEW MEN I Build!

Do YOU Want to Be One?

BY

Charles Atlas

CHARLES ATLAS
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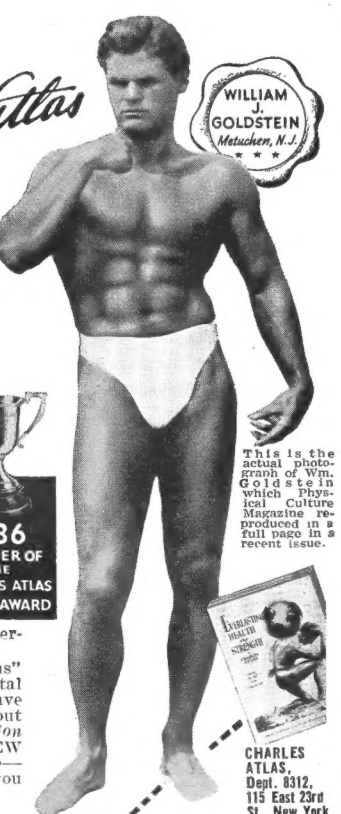

WILLIAM J. GOLDSTEIN
Metuchen, N.J.
★ ★ ★

This is the actual photograph of Wm. Goldstein which Physical Culture Magazine reproduced in a full page in a recent issue.

Men—meet William J. Goldstein, of Metuchen, N. J., winner of my 1936 Sterling Silver Cup! A smashing example of what my *Dynamic Tension can do!* Look at his sculptured stomach muscles—perfectly proportioned arms—beautiful leg muscles—giant shoulders. Read what he says. **"It seems like just yesterday that I mailed you that coupon. Look at me NOW! Your *Dynamic Tension* is the only system that can develop a build like mine—right in the privacy of a fellow's own home! No weights. No pulleys. No freak drugs or diets. I'm proud of the way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion'!"**

Do *you* want a prize-winning body like this? Are *you* fed up with having no strength, no vigor, being only HALF-ALIVE? Then listen—

1936 WINNER OF THE CHARLES ATLAS YEARLY AWARD

Give Me 7 Days and I'll Prove I Can Make YOU a Champion!

That's all I ask—SEVEN DAYS! In just ONE WEEK I'll absolutely PROVE that I can give you, too, the kind of body men respect and women admire! You will actually see and feel the improvement in even this short time.

I was once a skinny, timid weakling of only 97 lbs. I didn't know what real health or strength were. I was afraid to fight, ashamed to be seen in a swimming suit.

Then I discovered the amazing secret that changed me, like magic, into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"—the title I won *twice* and have held *ever since*, against all comers. My secret is *Dynamic Tension*. It is the *tested, natural* method of developing you *inside and out!* It not only can give YOU the powerful rippling muscles you'd like to see in your own mirror . . . it *also* digs down into your system after such needless, joy-killing conditions as ordinary constipation, pimples, indigestion, underweight and overweight.

I have no use for "contraptions" that can do your heart and other vital organs more harm than good. I have no pills or other queer ideas about body-building. My *Dynamic Tension* method is all it takes to make a NEW MAN of you in double-quick time—and I'm ready to PROVE it to you in a 7-day TRIAL OFFER.

Book of Photographs—FREE

Let me show you the amazing results produced for thousands of other men! I'll send you FREE my famous book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."** It shows actual photos. It tells exactly what I can now do for **your** body! Write your name and address carefully on Coupons. Mail to me personally **today.** I'll rush your free copy to you AT ONCE! Charles Atlas, Dept. 8312, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 8312, 115 East 23rd St., New York N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of **Dynamic Tension** will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

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THE BEST ANSWER IS...

Camels are the Largest-Selling cigarette in America!

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Camels have given more people more pleasure than any other cigarette!

AND this didn't happen by chance. Camels are the largest-selling cigarette in America... and in the *world*... because people *can* and *do* appreciate finer, costlier tobaccos.

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Includes "Jack Oakie College" and Benny Goodman's "Swing School"! Every Tuesday night at 9:30 pm E.S.T., 8:30 pm C.S.T., 7:30 pm M.S.T., 6:30 pm P.S.T., WABC-CBS.

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SHIP'S ENGINEER, G. Buckingham: "I've smoked Camels for years. I never tire of them."

Camels are a matchless blend of finer, **MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS** —Turkish and Domestic.

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